Surviving the Planet of the Apes

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Surviving the Planet of the Apes

by Sparkbreaker

Summary

Lea Davidson followed her brother into the wormhole that sent him to the Planet of the Apes. Now, she is forced to live in that world while trying to find him. As if that wasn't hard enough she becomes a servant to General Thade's sister. Will she be able to find Leo and make it out alive?

Notes

I own nothing but my OC Lea!

Prologue: A Human's Story

There's no chance, no destiny, no fate that can circumvent or hinder or control the firm resolve of a determined soul. –Ella Wheeler Wilcox

~*~

If someone had told me I'd end up on an alien planet ruled by talking apes… I would've walked away laughing. But those days are long gone. The fact is I'm living on said planet. In all honesty I can only say I've survived this long thanks to some good friends, my intelligence, and plain dumb luck. One particular friend gave me this book so it's thanks to her I can even record what happened to me.

Depending on who you are, including what species you were born as, you may not believe me. It doesn't matter. The point is you are reading this and my voice is being heard. For all I know you'll burn this as soon as you're done. That's your choice. All I ask is that you read my story first. Just once.

It is up to you dear reader to decide what will happen to my tale. Write it off as fiction or incoherent ramblings. The musings of a young girl. A human. Yes, my friends and foes. I am a human. But do not let that dismay you. Let it encourage you.

For any of my potential allies wouldn't you like to know what goes on in a human's mind? What I might think and feel? Do I even have anything in my brain worth writing down?

As for any of my enemies… You're only against me if you wish to be. I suppose there's not much I can say. If you've made up your mind to destroy my words there's not much I can do to stop you. For all I know I'll be dead by the time you read these very words. Hopefully, your curiosity will entice you enough to read on. It's the most I can hope for.

Now that's settled where does my story begin exactly? Oh, I probably should tell you who I am first. My name is Lea Davidson and I was a pilot under my brother Captain Leo Davidson of the U.S. Air Force. I come from a planet called Earth.

Pericles and Semos

OC information

Name: Lea Davidson

Age: 18

Hair: Shoulder length brown hair.

Eyes: Almond shaped with the right being a golden color and the left is grey.

Height: 5'3"

Weight: Fluffy (Means a bit pudgy but in a cute way.)

~*~

It began as just another normal day on the station. The USAF Oberon Space Research Station to be exact. Me and my older brother Leo were in charge of helping teach the apes and monkeys how to fly ships under even the most stressful and unpredictable situations.

Our flyers are so high-tech normally all they apes or monkeys have to do is press a specific button or two if something went wrong. However, try to get a panicking ape to think rationally and calmly in a ship with flashing lights, numerous sounds, and turbulence was difficult. I've seen inexperienced pilots crack under pressure.

Right now my brother's favorite chimp, Pericles, was in the flight simulator. This was probably the fifth time we'd run this particular sequence. Unfortunately, he started freaking out as soon as the simulator began experiencing a fake disruption. Couldn't blame him because that thing is pretty realistic when you're in it. The only issue is we know he's capable of handling this type of scenario.

We both looked at each other. Leo let out a sigh but I held it in. I had more patience than Leo when it came to this. Or maybe it was because I hung out with all the animals on board more than he did. We walked into the line of sight for the pod. Even though he could see us clearly poor Pericles was still having a fit.

"You lose," Leo hit the button that terminated the fake image. "Again."

We walked up to where the screaming ape was thrashing around in his chair. "Change the flight sequence Pericles," I gently said trying to snap him out of it. It didn't appear to work.

"Hey, that's enough. Stop, pay attention," Leo instructed trying to show him what he should have done. "Pericles, stop. I mean it or not treat." That's all my brother had to say and the chimp stopped to look at us with pleading eyes. It melted my heart every time and I'm sure it

also got to Leo. A second later my brother flipped open the chimp's helmet and gave him the treat. "Although, we know you know."

"Come on buddy," I helped him out of the fake pod. "Let's get you back to Grace huh?" I asked giving him the treat I had.

"You'll spoil him," Leo warned as we walked on either side of Pericles. He liked to dangle in between our hands like a little kid.

"Will not. Everyone needs to feel special every once and a while Leo." We made our way to the main holding area for all the apes and monkeys. Holding cells lined the walls while trainers dealt with some of the primates personally. One chimp was painting and I could hear someone banging away on some music toy.

Pericles wasted no time jumping into Lt. Colonel Grace Alexander's arms when he saw her. "Hey, there you are," she said. "What? Was the homo-sapien mean to you again?" she indicated my brother. "Huh? We all know it's just rocket envy don't we?"

"Ever consider on actual boyfriend?" Leo inquired and I elbowed him in the ribs.

"You mean do I enjoy being miserable? No thanks, I think I'll stick with my chimps."

"I hear you," I smiled at her.

"See? Your sister knows what I mean."

"She doesn't count," he countered. "She's not allowed to date until after I'm dead. Hey," he got Pericles' attention. He held out both his hands in front of him to ask which one held the treat. But when the chimp checked both were empty. Poor Pericles looked confused at us. Leo then pulled out the actual treat from a back pocket. Seeing the looks both me and Grace were giving him he explained, "I'm teaching him."

"No, you're teasing him," Grace stated.

"Aw Pericles," I handed him a treat as he jumped into my arms. "You want me to get Leo back for you huh?" He gave me a blank stare. He never was a mean chimp. He had a few tantrums here or there but always behaved well. "Don't worry," I hugged him. "I will."

"Hey," Leo attempted to defend himself. "He's gene spliced chromosome enhanced. State of the art monkey he can handle it." I rolled my eyes. After all this time he still referred to all of them as monkeys and not apes. For someone so smart my brother could be a real idiot.

"You know what," Grace pointed out. "When you frustrate them they lose focus. Can become confused, even violent." As if to illustrate a point one of the female chimps started acting up. Her name was Aspasia. "Hey, congratulations, Pericles," Grace said as we headed over to the cage. "You're gonna be a daddy."

"I thought I saw a smirk in his face," Leo commented.

"Actually the female was the aggressive one," she informed us.

"You're not aggressive are you?" I asked her. "You're just ahead of your time."

It was then my brother went to go check on a postcard. I handed Pericles back to Grace and then made my usual rounds. I liked to check up on all the primates aboard but I did have a few favorites. Pericles was one of them. But there were a few others. One was another adult male chimp named Semos. Strange name I know but I guess it was a play on the name of the man we got him from. It was that or he'd have the long ass name of Jonathon.

Most of the trainees didn't really care to work with him. Everyone on board said he had a bit of a temper. I'll admit he could pitch a fit but I didn't think he was that much worse than any of the others.

"Hey," I greeted standing in front of his cage. "How's my big boy today?" He didn't grin or react like most of the other apes did when they were happy. People think he's stand offish. Personally, I believe he was a bit conservative until he got really excited. But he did come over to the side of the cage and looked at me. "Hi Semos. Guess what I brought you?" That's when he got that happy look on his face. He stuck his hand through the bars and I handed him the treat.

He ate it in two seconds. I was still within his arms' reach of the bars. So he grabbed me and gently pulled me over to the cage. I couldn't help but let out a small laugh as he searched the rest of my pockets for any more. He found one and was ecstatic. After he figured out I didn't have any more food he just messed around with my hair and attempted to groom me.

"I don't know how you do it," Grace stated after she'd put Pericles back in his holding pen.

"He's a good guy," I played around a bit. "Once you get to know him. Think I could let him out for a bit later?"

"I don't see why not. You're the only one he lets play or work with him. But before you do mind helping me with another ape first?"

"Sure, which one?" I asked.

"Orpheus."

I must have tensed because Semos pulled me as close to the bars as he could without hurting me. Then he held me there while making screeching sounds. I cared for all the primates we had and I'd work with nearly all of them. Except for Orpheus. There was just something up with that orangutan. Now, I'd work with any other orangutan. In fact, everyone seemed to love him. He was a favorite. Always well-behaved, smart, and never threw a tantrum or got frustrated. He seemed like the perfect subject.

But something didn't feel right to me. He'd never attacked me, none of the primates had surprisingly, or even looked at me wrong. Everyone on board said I was paranoid and that I had nothing to worry about. They wondered why I didn't feel this way about Semos. Still… I'd learned to trust my instincts. They helped me judge each primates attributes and act accordingly. They were the same that told me Semos would never hurt me. And every time I was near Orpheus they screamed at me to steer clear.

"Oh," Grace realized which ape it was. Everyone here knew I'd work with any primate but him. "Never mind."

"Thanks Grace," I sighed. "I owe you one."

"You'll pay me back," she indicated Semos who'd read my body language and went back to grooming me.

The Storm

It is here I wish to stop my reflections for a moment to state a few things. Once again, depending on what species you are and where you are from you may already be disregarding my story as nothing more than fancy.

A human on a ship in space? Apes in cages while humans train them? It might sound unbelievable. But hear me out… You've already read this much of my tale. Please read a little more. I promise everything will be explained in due time. For the longest time I was as lost as you might be now. All I can do is wonder with you what will happen but back to my story.

~*~

It was then the ship's lights began to flicker and the apes started going nuts. Semos held onto me even tighter when the ship went dark for about ten seconds. Then me and my brother were commed to come to the bridge. But Semos didn't want to let me go.

"Hey, hey," I reassured him. "Everything's going to be fine. I'll be back." He looked at me for a moment. And it's only the type of stare an ape can give you. Almost as if any barrier between you disappears and they see your very being. Most people believed I was projecting but I found it hard to look directly back into his eyes and not see some reasoning there. Almost reluctantly he let me go. I gave him one last smile and wave. "I'll see you in a little bit, Semos." However, I had no idea that would be the last time I would see him.

Me and Leo made it up there at the same time and entered the bridge. Everyone appeared excited and Commander Vasich commented on how it was an electrical storm. When I looked out the window the storm itself appeared to be an enormous mixture of blue and purple hues. Like a giant hurricane in space. What was strange was that we began picking up frequencies. Communications from various time periods of Earth.

"Ok, let's get to work," the Commander stated. "We'll start with a pass through the central core. Take initial radiation and gamma ray readings. Get your monkey ready," he told us.

"Excuse me, sir," Leo said. "Hope you don't mind me saying but this is a waste of time."

"Look, we have standard operating procedures…"

"We're well aware of the procedures, sir," I added. "But if we go through all of them it could be gone."

"No manned flights," he saw through us. "We start sending out an ape. Then if it's safe we talk about a pilot. That's an order."

"You need somebody out there who can think," Leo started.

"Why don't you allow us to do our jobs?" I finished. People hated it when we tag-teamed them.

"He's the canary, that's the coal mine," he pointed at the storm. "Your monkey launches at 16 hundred." The Commander left no room for argument so we went to go prepare Pericles.

~*~

A short time later he was in his suit and we put him in Pod Alpha. Grace and a few others were there for a final check as we buckled him into his seat. Pericles looked to us one final time. "Alright, just follow your sequence and come home," Leo told him.

"Understand?" I asked. "Home." There was a beep that told us he was in the clear. We gave him a thumbs up for reassurance. He gave us one in return and smiled. The pod closed and he still gave us a thumbs up until we couldn't see him anymore.

Immediately we walked to the bridge so we could keep an eye on him and instruct him through the comm. "Ok Perciles," my brother said. "Start sequence one."

"Activate reading systems," I instructed. "Ignition." Everything started off fine. He did what he was supposed to. However, as he got closer to the storm he began veering off course.

"Lock on him," the Commander ordered.

We tried but it was almost as if he disappeared from our sensors completely. "He cannot respond, sir."

"There's a surge in the heart rate," Grace informed us. "He's scared."

"Line him up again."

"We can't," Leo told him. "He's gone."

"He's trained to come back to the Oberon," Grace stated.

"If he's still alive," one of the crewmen said.

I looked at Leo and I'm positive we had the same idea. "Sir…"

"For now we just sit tight and wait."

We weren't going to accept that. "I'm gonna run some sequences in Delta Pod," Leo said. "Figure out what he did wrong."

"I'll help him," I followed him out to where the pods were. Leo jumped in and turned on the comm.

"The signal is breaking up," they reported. My brother started firing up the pod when the Commander came on and said he was shutting down launch operations. Leo scrambled to put the suit on and launch.

"I'm coming with you," I stated.

"No Lea," he was nearly ready. "You stay here. I mean it." With that the pod closed and he was being jettisoned out into space. Without stopping to think about it I immediately jumped into nearby Beta Pod and did the same as my brother before anyone could stop me. I wasn't about to let him go after Pericles alone. Back then I had no way of knowing I'd just made the biggest decision of my life.

~*~

Mission control was not happy with us. We ignored them as I followed after Leo toward the storm. "I thought I told you to stay put."

"You know the old saying," I countered. "Never send a man to do a woman's job."

"Very funny." A few seconds later we hit turbulence and alarms went off. Suddenly, we could see Alpha Pod in front of us. I radioed in but I didn't get a response nor did I hear anything from Leo. Without warning there was a blinding flash of light. Before we could get to him Pericles' pod was engulfed in it.

"NO! Oberon do you read me?" I readjusted my controls but it didn't do much. "Leo?" I tried. Right before he was gone like Pericles. "LEO!" I called. "Do you read me? Hello! Oberon, Leo! Can anybody hear me?" I'd never been trained for anything like this. "Anybody?" And that's when my own vortex of blinding white light hit me.

All Alone

Chapter Notes

Yes, I know Leo ended up popping out on the planet on the year 5021. But his pod's last recorded time was 21 08 2427. So what could this mean for Lea? Also I wanted to have it so that she didn't have any of her technology to rely on.

I couldn't see for a moment and my pod shook from the impact. A second later everything was deathly quiet as I floated. I couldn't see any of the other pods or the Oberon. "Hello? Oberon do you read? Leo?" I attempted to fix my drifting but I came to the horrifying conclusion my ship was dead. Before I even had the chance to react there was another, larger impact, and more blinding light.

As soon as I came out this time my equipment came back online. I only had a few moments to readjust before I began plummeting. Quickly, I looked up to see I was caught in a planet's gravitational field. "Oberon?" I tried again as my pod was making a descent. "Do you read? Leo? I am going down. I repeat, I am going down." Sparks started flying and my equipment struggled as much as I did. I was coming in at an angle I didn't like and falling way too fast. It didn't seem like I could do much or had any say in what happened next.

Finally, I made it through the atmosphere and clouds. From the landscape blurring below me it appeared to be either forest or marsh. In front of me was green and more green. "Great," I commented attempting to activate the landing gears. They wouldn't do much for me in this case but might help slow me down.

"Oh crap," I noted as blue came into view. Water might seem like the best beat but it can also be twice as dangerous. If I couldn't get out of the ship… I didn't have time to dwell on that as my ship made impact with the tree line. Even in my buckled seat I jerked about violently. It felt like the ship bounced across the ground before I actually came into contact with the water.

I managed to read the ship's measurements. The air was breathable and the planet appeared to be able to support me. That was one good thing in this mess. My pod might as well have been a pebble skipping across the surface. All I could do was hang on and wait for the ride to end.

Luckily, I only seemed to skip a few times before my ship came to a screeching halt. Not two seconds later water poured in and I had to get out. Normally these pods are meant to be buoyant. Mine sank like a rock. Most likely due to all the damage it sustained on entry. I only had enough time to unstrap and get the hell out. I didn't even have a moment to grab my gear. Instead, I got to watch as Beta Pod sank into the depths of whatever ocean this was.

I removed my helmet and gasped for air as I came to the surface. When I looked to my right I saw land and swam for it. Most of my heavier gear I wore had to go as a result. All I ended up being left with was a white T-shirt, pair of pants, and my boots. It took me probably ten minutes to make it to shore. After I did I nearly collapsed in the sand.

Five minutes passed before I caught my breath and took in my surroundings. There was hardly any beach at all. It appeared to go almost directly into a dense forest. And when I glanced into the sky I noticed it would be dark soon. Not one but three moons shown in the sky. While I was looking up I searched for any other pods. My heart sank as none came into sight.

I hoped both of them would have a better landing than I did. And actually be able to recover their equipment. At the very least I knew they'd be able to breathe… Thoughts raced through my head as I went to try and make a fire or find a shelter for the night.

One thought was especially disconcerting and would remain in the back of my mind all night. Of course I knew equipment could malfunction and such. Hell my entire ship had when I'd been floating dead in space. And that storm had done a number on my landing systems. However, I had been able to notice something before the storm spit me out on whatever planet this was. My pod's clock had read 01 12 2426.

Planet of the Apes

The next part of my tale I'll admit is a bit boring. For weeks I traversed through the jungle. To my fortune I was able to find enough water and ate some of the local vegetation. Reminded me of Earth's fruits actually. But there was no sign of anyone. I encountered plenty of fauna, including birds and fish I was able to catch.

If you're lost the wisest thing to do is to stay put. Let your rescuers come to you. But I had no way of signaling any of the other pods or Oberon. And by the way my ship appeared the last time I saw it I don't think they'd get any sort of signal from it. So, my best beat would be to locate one of the other pods and hope they're tracking signals worked.

No matter how far I traveled from where I'd crash landed there was no sign of my brother or Pericles. The only thing I managed to find was where my ship had taken out a few trees. By this point I figured their pods were either as bad off as mine or… Well I didn't really want to consider the alternative. Because if they had been able to fly they would've come to my last recorded position. The same for the Oberon if it was going to come rescue me.

For all I knew they could've landed on the opposite side of the bloody planet. Just in case I stuck to that specific area for a time. Must have been the loneliest weeks of my life. Going from a big but compact ship like the Oberon to a jungle was a transition. Every day I hoped to hear or see my brother or even Pericles. And each day I was met with disappointment. Trust me when I say you have no idea how silent things can get when you're the only one.

To be honest I'd nearly given up hope. Until the day I stumbled onto some tracks. And these were clearly not made by any animals. It appeared to be a big wheeled cart of some sort and I could've sworn it was being pulled by horses.

After weeks of isolation I was giddy at this find. I secretly hoped these tracks had been made by Leo but didn't get my expectations too high. Even if it wasn't him then it meant there was some intelligent life somewhere else on this planet. I wasn't the only one.

It was then I resolved to leave my crash site behind and follow the tracks. I was pretty sure no one was coming for, or even able to find, me. If I wanted to be saved I'd have to do it myself. Back then I was also a bit optimistic. I thought maybe I could find whoever inhabited the world and they would help me out. Boy I was naïve.

~*~

The journey itself wasn't remarkable. I simply followed the tracks for what I guessed was a week. Still no sign of civilization other than that. I went further into the jungle then I ever had before. On the eighth day of my trip I got my first clue all was not right.

Mostly I kept my eyes on the tracks. But that day I happened to notice something metal not too far off. And a horrible smell. Normally I would've kept on my way but this was my first sign of anything not naturally occurring. Curiosity got the better of me and I went to investigate. To this day I wish I hadn't.

At first I couldn't make out what it was because vines and such had grown over and around it. The smell had gotten even worse but I ignored it. I yanked on the dark metal and found it took most of my strength to budge the darn thing. When I did the sight I was greeted with nearly made me scream. I wasn't ignorant of horrible things in the world. But seeing a dead body after it's been all dressed up or on a screen is far different than in real life.

The body was clearly human. I could see enough of the skeleton to figure that out. It was in a horrible state of decomposition. Maggots infested it and crawled along what muscles it had left holding it together. There was no skin, ears, hair, or eyes left. I should be thankful most of it was covered by tattered and weathered clothing.

I looked down to see one of the legs was caught in the metal. It was fashioned in much the way a bear trap is. The bones in it appeared to be broken. But the most horrifying part of this entire picture is that the mouth was gapped open. Like whoever this was had died screaming.

I somehow managed not to barf and ran back to the trail. It was hard for me to process what I'd just seen. The only comfort I had was that it couldn't have been my brother. Neither the clothes nor the build matched his. But it did hold a shit load of other complications.

A human corpse meant there was, or had been, at least one other person besides myself on the planet. But why had they been clothed in rags? Surely people who could make carts could make clothes better than that. Why had that person died in a trap? I know even the best hunters sometimes have accidents with their own equipment but somehow I severely doubted that was the case here.

This could only lead to a handful of other scenarios. One, this person stumbled upon someone else's trap. I didn't think this because why hadn't the hunter come back and found them? The trap itself looked well-made and relatively new. Not something you'd just carelessly leave lying around. Or my other reason I dreaded. Someone was intentionally hunting whoever that was.

Considering the person's clothes and why they'd just been left to rot this made a little more sense. But who was hunting them? More people? Or were humans not the only intelligent species running around? And if that was so, who or what would I face if I kept following these tracks?

~*~

I got my answers the next day. Besides those tracks I had little else to go on. So, I followed them a bit more carefully. I stopped and listened at every little noise I heard. When I rested or ate some of my food I kept as quiet as possible.

My paranoia most likely saved me. I stopped and listened as I heard something up ahead. It sounded like hooves. Thinking fast, I made my way into the dense jungle and hid behind a vine infested tree. I was able to peek through a few of the vines to see who was in the makeshift road. You can understand my amazement at hearing not only voices after weeks of silence but whoever it was spoke in my language.

"Let's make this quick," one male voice said. "Or General Thade will chew us out like last time."

"I know," a deeper voice replied. "If it's not him then it's Colonel Attar."

Depending upon who you are you may or may not understand why my heart almost stopped when I saw who exactly was riding those horses. On one horse was a chimp, but he was much larger than any I'd ever seen and wore armor. A gorilla with much the same description road the other and they were both talking.

The chimp jumped off the horse and went into the jungle on the opposite side where I was hidden. I heard a metallic sound and saw him lift up a trap. Like the one the corpse had been in. "This one's empty," he told the gorilla. "This area's clear." He hoped back onto his horse as they turned around.

"Wait," the gorilla stated. "I smell something."

I froze and held my breath. But to my good fortune the chimp brushed it off. "It's just the stench of humans stuck in your nose. We can get the smell off of us later. If we don't report back now the General will make us work a double shift. Again." He started riding away.

"Eh," the gorilla shrugged and followed. "You're right. There's no way I'm working another shift. I'm around humans too much as it is."

"You're telling me…" Their voices and the sound of hoof beats faded away. I was finally able to take a deep breath and slumped against the tree.

"What planet am I on?!" I internally screamed. I didn't want to make any noise in case they came back. Giant talking apes that wear clothes and ride horses? It sounded like a bad joke… But my brain knew what it had just witnessed. It also hadn't missed how they'd spoken of humans like we were some sort of disease. Or how they had checked that trap.

So the apes looked to be in charge while people were hunted like animals? I'd been trained for numerous situations but nothing remotely like this. It was like I was in an episode of the Twilight Zone. But this was real life and it was happening to me.

I was really stuck on a planet of the apes.

A Trap

After sitting there digesting what I'd just witnessed I came back to my senses. The first thing I did was go and take care of that trap. I ripped it up and threw it in a nearby lake. There was no way I was just going to leave it there for someone else to stumble into it. The next couple of days I searched over the area and found ten more of them. I disposed of them in the same manner.

Yes, I would alert the apes to my presence. But at that moment I could have cared less. And whatever I could do to help another human being I'd do it. If the apes thought they were so much smarter than humans… Well I could play this game too.

~*~

I only learned of certain events after they unfolded but this is one of them.

"How many have gone missing today?" General Thade questioned his subordinates.

They both looked at each other in apprehension before answering. "Three more, sir," one got up the courage to answer.

He let out an annoyed shriek. "That's the fourth time this week. And you're certain there's no trace of any humans in the area?"

"No, sir," the other answered.

"Then you must be missing something," he got in their faces. "Traps don't just disappear on their own. I find it hard to believe you've allowed this to go on for three weeks. We can't afford these types of setbacks. Some might begin to question our efficiency dealing with the human infestation."

He walked away from them and peered out into the jungle from his office. Thade had only learned of this trap thief a little over a week ago. Yes, sometimes traps were misplaced or lost… But not nearly at this level. No, someone was purposefully removing them. He honestly had no clue where they disappeared to but he could guess.

There were only two options to explain the situation. One, there was a human activist running around. He wouldn't put it past any of the human lovers to do such a thing. But the only human sympathizers around was Ari and her father. The senator would never do such a thing and Ari had never gone to the level of destroying military property. No, he had a feeling it was the second option.

And boy did it grate on his nerves. The second theory was that there was a clever human running around. He did mean whoever it was would have to be smart. Not only were they going in and messing with the traps… But it also meant they were intelligent enough to avoid them and the patrols that came to collect or check them.

"What should we do, sir?" the chimp asked him.

"Should we burn this thief out, sir?" the gorilla inquired.

"No," Thade told them. "We can't afford to lose that much territory again. The senate would revoke what little progress we've managed to make…" It was night and nothing could be detected in the thick brush of the jungle. He thought it over for a moment before a grin came to his face. He turned back to his subordinates. "There's only one way to catch this type of thief. We set a trap."

Caught

I'd been hanging around the area for about three weeks now. It was a bit of a challenge to keep the patrols from finding me and take care of the traps. But in all honesty it's not like there was anything else to do. Besides the talking apes I hadn't seen any other humans running around. I couldn't be the only human and I hoped it was only because they were off hiding in better locations than this.

Also I noted none of the apes cared for water much. I knew this was a possibility having worked with apes and monkeys but still. These apes wore armor, rode horses, and talked. I would have thought they could have figured out swimming. I suppose that factor was on my side because no one ever went to retrieve the traps I threw into the nearby pond.

One day though everything changed. I heard a clamor start up in the otherwise calm jungle. I stayed up in the tree I was in for a better vantage point. One thing I noticed is that the apes rarely looked up. It was like they didn't expect humans to be in trees.

That's when I saw them. It was maybe thirty or so humans running for what appeared to be their lives through the foliage. They were of all ages and I could see some parents carrying their children as they ran. Chimps and gorillas were right after them. Some chimps were in the trees so I had to wedge myself into a crack in the tree I was hiding in.

None of them saw me because they were busy handling the humans on the ground. They got some with ropes and a few children with nets. I stayed perfectly still as I helplessly watched my fellow humans being captured. But there wasn't anything I could do. I didn't have a weapon and there was no way I could overpower an ape. Let alone what appeared to be twenty of them and they looked like they were in some type of army.

One particular family unit caught my attention. There was an old man, a woman who appeared near my brother's age, and a little girl in her arms. They ran right under my tree when a chimp attacked them from the side. He jumped on the woman and knocked her down. The old man immediately turned around and went after the chimp. Only for the chimp to focus on him. He jumped on the old man as the woman gathered up the little girl again. "Father!" she screamed. I could tell by the look on her face she was caught between running and helping the old man. "Run!" the old man told them.

It was then I saw red as the chimp on top of him continued to beat on him. I positioned myself right over the ape and dropped out of the tree. Even in my angry state I knew I only had the element of surprise working for me. I guess I was the last thing anyone in the little group expected.

I landed right on the chimps back. Even though these apes looked tougher than humans I still think my weight hurt him. At least it stunned him enough the old man was able to roll out from under him. I quickly rolled onto my feet and saw more apes heading our way. I looked to the group and motioned that we needed to go.

None of them needed to be told twice and I took off with them. I kept my eyes open but it's hard to keep track of all the apes when you're running for your life. I could tell the apes weren't killing anyone but capturing them. They were also spread out in a pattern like hunters would be like they were herding us somewhere. I knew if we couldn't find an opening in that pattern it wouldn't lead to good news.

"This way," the old man pointed up ahead where there appeared to be no apes.

"No!" I told them. "It's a trap." I peered to our left and saw another way. "This way." They looked at each other as if questioning to follow me. "NOW!"

The old man nodded and they followed me. Turns out my instincts were right. Any human that ran the way we were going was immediately tackled by apes or had nets dropped down on them. If we could just break through then we should be fine. Only fate wasn't entirely on my side.

A chimp jumped in front of us. He was the only one around for at least thirty feet and if we could just get past him we'd be home free. Only problem was there was no way to get past him. Well… Not all of us. I knew instantly what I had to do. I gritted my teeth, braced myself, and ran right at him. I don't think he was expecting that.

I hit him as hard as I could and we rolled on the ground. It was everything I had to keep him from pounding on me. "Go!" I told the family. They hesitated before the old man got them moving. They ran past us grappling in the dirt and my eyes connected with the man's. He gave a nod before he disappeared into the jungle. I might have been screwed but I'd done what needed to be.

"Get it off of me!" the chimp I was dealing with yelled to his comrades.

I actually heard someone laugh as I was lifted into the air by two pairs of arms. "What's the matter Irto?" a gorilla chuckled as he and a buddy threw me into a net. Another gorilla hung me up in the air like I was a bird or something. "Letting a little human getting the better of you?"

"You deal with that one then," said chimp was far from pleased as he got up. "It nearly tore my arm out of socket."

"Look," another chimp got really close to me. "Its eyes are different colors. I've never seen a human like this."

"You're right," another gorilla smirked when he looked at me. "I bet we'll get double no triple the price for it at the market."

"Market? Ha!" the chimp from earlier laughed. "We could sell this one to the highest bidder. Doctors always want new test subjects."

"Or some collector," the Irto chimp stated. "You never know who'll want it."

"General Thade will be happy with this one," the gorilla holding me said. "Let's go before Colonel Attar starts yelling."

I wasn't dragged across the ground thank goodness but carried by the gorilla. We came to the edge of the forest and I noticed a sort of caravan. Chimps and gorillas were tossing humans into these caged carts. A few were tied up and were probably going to be forced to walk. A couple others like me were kept in nets and tied to hooks gutting out of the carts. It reminded me how fishermen hung up their catch.

"Move out!" I heard a deep voice yell and we started moving. It wasn't long before I felt my legs starting to go to sleep from the awkward position I was in. Also we kept getting farther and farther away from the forest I'd spent so much time in. I could see some humans come out far enough to look at us. I even heard a couple wails and it was probably friends and family of those captured. I saw the family I'd helped get away but couldn't see their faces that well. I hoped I'd at least given them a chance in this strange world. I had no clue what was about to happen to me.

Saved?

We traveled for what must have been half an hour when we reached another forested area. I could hear numerous voices when we got closer and saw an entire city within the jungle. Of course most of these were apes. There were sellers, buyers, musicians, and everything else you could imagine. The few humans I did see were either being led around on leashes or had collars on them and were carrying things like a servant.

This did not bode well for me. The other humans I was with looked utterly defeated and didn't say a word as we were led through a marketed area. Ape children ran through the street and occasionally threw things at us yelling stuff like, "Stupid humans!" and "Ew they stink!".

I kept my mouth shut until I could assess the situation. We stopped after a few minutes and I could see we were meeting up with another group of apes. They seemed to take over things and then everyone stood at attention. Apparently this chimp riding a horse was an important individual. "General Thade," a gorilla saluted him. "Mission accomplished, sir."

"Good work old friend," I swear the way that chimp looked around was like he was analyzing everything. It was sorta creepy and I was used to apes. "How many were captured?"

"Twenty, sir. They should fetch a high price for us."

"Sirs," the chimp I'd grappled with earlier approached them respectfully. They nodded for him to speak. "There's something you may wish to see." Oh crap. Sure enough he led them over to where I was still hanging.

"What is it?" the chimp inquired eyeing me over. I attempted to act innocent by not meeting his gaze.

"This human sir," the chimp pulled me down enough so that he could grab my head and force me to look at this General Thade. "It has different colored eyes." This seemed to get almost everyone's attention as they attempted to look at me from where they were.

"That cannot be possible," the important looking gorilla stated. "I've never seen this before." Really? I know it's not the most common thing but they'd never seen it before?

"Interesting," General Thade stated and I didn't like the way he was looking at me. "We should get a good price for it then."

"General Thade, sir!" another chimp approached him.

"What is it?" he asked. The subordinate indicated behind him and I saw a female chimp in green robes standing there. Unlike these guys she was dressed in civilian clothes but they looked a little fancy. She held herself in such a way as if none of this bothered her, including the military apes most of the rest of the apes seemed to show respect as we went through town.

"Lola," General Thade got off of his horse and approached her. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to visit you," she noticed me and we made eye contact. Her expression seemed to soften for a second before she turned to face him again. "Am I not allowed to? It is my birthday after all."

"I know that sister," he answered and patted her gently on the shoulder. "I shouldn't be much longer here. Then I will return home and we will do whatever it is you want."

"Let me guess," she lightly smiled and returned the gesture. "You'll then buy me whatever I want?"

"Yes," he agreed. Hard to believe these two were really related. Where he was all fierce and dominating she seemed humbled and friendly. But she stood tall and talked to him like they were equals.

"Why don't we do that now?"

"I am…" he began but she cut him off.

"What if I told you I want that human," she nodded at me. Thade looked back at me and let out a little snarl.

"Surely you joke."

"I'm serious," she took a step toward me but he stopped her.

"You don't want this human," he informed her. "It was just taken from the wild. It's feral. If you want a human then we'll get you one that's already been trained."

"No," she sidestepped him and came up to me. "I want this one." She put her hand through the net before anyone could object and patted me on the head. "See? She's perfectly tame."

"We have no way of knowing that," Thade took his sister's hand out of the net. "What if it's diseased?"

"Come now," she actually let out a little laugh. "You said I could have anything I wanted. And I want her. Cut her down will you?" she asked the Irto guy standing there. Thade let out a deep sigh but nodded for him to do so. He cut me down and I took a second to get back on my shaky asleep legs. I kept my head down like I was meek. It couldn't hurt to play it up here.

"Hello," Lola approached me and looked into my face. "You have beautiful eyes," she cooed and actually grabbed my face. I put on the friendliest expression possible. "Aw you're adorable. I want her," she turned back to face her brother.

"Lola," he started but I could see she'd worn him down.

"Please brother?" she finished him off.

"Very well," he relented and motioned for one of the chimps to get something. I soon figured out what that was as a collar and leash were put on my neck. I acted like it was nothing as Lola was given it. "But if something were to happen…" If looks could kill. I kept my face down though.

"Nothing is going to happen," she reassured him. "I can handle it. Well, I'll see you later at home. Don't be late." Then she turned to me. "Come along girl," she gently pulled on the leash and I followed her. It was the most demeaning thing in my entire life but I knew it could be far worse if I didn't play along. "We have a few errands to run before we go to your new home."

A New Home

She led me a little distance away before she glanced back to see if anyone was nearby. When she saw the cost was clear she pulled me aside and acted like she was messing with my hair. Instead she whispered to me. "It's alright," she stated with a soft smile. "Just act like you have been and do what I say and you'll be fine. We'll speak more tonight when we can have privacy. Do you have any questions before we go on?"

I didn't think this was some sort of trick. She didn't look like she was lying and she did just help me out. I think. "What can I call you?" I threw out. Were humans even allowed to talk at all?

"In private my name but in front of anyone else my lady or mistress. I'm sorry." She really did look apologetic as we continued on. Soon enough we came upon the market area the caravan had gone through. She walked through with her head held high and I could tell the sellers knew exactly who she was. They tried to call out to her and grab her attention with their merchandise. A lot of them she either ignored or smiled and waved before she moved on. It didn't seem like she was being rude but if I was in her position I wouldn't want to be bothered that much either.

They stared at me and I saw more than one motion to me and mention my eyes. I guess I wasn't what they were expecting. We kept on and occasionally Lola would say hello to someone in passing. Eventually she led me to a building that looked to be partially made out of stones and inside a tree. It would have been intriguing if it hadn't been for the situation I was currently in.

Once we were inside I noticed it must have been some type of beauty salon or something. Female apes of all ages were there getting what appeared to be treatments. They were getting their nails and hair done like people would. Only there weren't any hair dryers but they didn't seem to mind. Just like back on Earth it appeared they enjoyed the gossiping to anything actually being done to them.

"Lola!" one female ape nearly screamed when she saw her. She immediately came over and hugged her. "Happy birthday. I swear you look younger every year." This ape had flowers in her hair and wore pink robes that almost glittered. The other stylists seemed to have much the same fashion tastes.

"Thank you Vena," Lola told her. "You always know how to flatter me."

"What's this?" she indicated me and I acted meek by trying to hide behind Lola.

"A present," Lola casually explained like it was nothing. "My brother gave her to me."

"Ah! Look at her eyes," Vena gushed and ran over to me. "I've never seen anything like them. Come see this!" she yelled at everyone. Some apes just looked at me from where they stood while others stood up and got a little closer. "Where did he get her?"

"Just caught her today," Lola waved it off.

"EEP!" the female ape jumped back. "Lola, you brought a feral human in here?!" I could tell by the way they acted no one was very pleased by that.

"Calm down," Lola kept cool and acted like she was looking at a flower arrangement. "It's not what you think. Her old masters died and there was nowhere for her to go. So she just ended up in the wild. Luckily, my brother's men caught her before she could starve to death. Isn't that right?" she cooed at me.

I kept my face down and acted meek while I nodded my head. I think that got a little sympathy from the apes like how you feel bad for a lost dog. "Aw," Vena came back up to me. "That's so sad. But you're lucky. I've heard most humans turn feral in that situation. So what can I do for you today? Manicure? I just got in a new shipment of flowers from the south."

"Actually I was hoping you could help me with her," she indicated me. "I don't want to take her home looking like that. You understand?"

"Perfectly," Vena and another chimp started looking me up and down. "You know just last week we cleaned up Nina's human. I swear I have no idea how they get so dirty. Hm. Oh this is going to be fun. Rita get my measuring tape. Lola we can also give you a new perfuming while you wait."

"That sounds wonderful."

Just like that I was made over. They scrubbed me down, threw out my old clothes, and measured me for new ones. They cut the dead ends out of my hair, cut my nails, and splashed me down with some type of lotion and perfume. Then they put the new outfit on me. It consisted of what might have been considered a tank top, shorts, leg wrappings, new shoes, and a skirt with golden flower trimmings on it. All of it was a matching shade of brown. **(If you want a better picture, look on my deviantart page.)**

"What do you think?" Vena asked Lola once I was done.

"Beautiful," Lola looked me over while she finished her drink. "You always do a wonderful job."

"I don't mean to boast. Oh I almost forgot. We have to complete the picture." She pulled out a new color. This one was brown and had golden spikes on it. She gave it to Lola to look it over before she put it on me. "There I challenge anyone else to make a human look this adorable. And smell this good."

"This has been wonderful," Lola said as she motioned for me to follow her. "But I'm afraid I have to go. Layla and Zena are waiting for me."

"Go, go. You don't want to keep them waiting. And don't be afraid to come back. Wait a second," she pulled out what might have been a piece of candy and handed it to me. "You

were such a good girl," she patted my head. "I swear I've never seen such a well behaved human."

"Goodbye," I followed Lola out. "Normally humans are kept on leashes but I think you've proven you know how to behave." I followed a few feet after her as she stated it. She didn't say much else on the way to her home and boy that was one hell of a house. If you can somehow call it a house.

It was set in what must have been an upscale neighborhood. They were much like everything else around there. They were made of stone but were almost interconnected thanks to being practically inside trees. But these homes were at least twice as big as the other ones I'd seen or any of the shops.

"Welcome to your new home," Lola told me as we entered the door.

"Mommy!" a high pitched voice called out. A young female chimpanzee came running in and jumped into Lola's arms. She wore a light blue dress that reminded me of a princess dress a young girl might wear.

"Hello sweetie," Lola greeted her with a hug.

"Mistress," a female voice greeted her. What must have been a red ruffed lemur came into the room. She was smaller than the apes I'd seen but was larger than any lemur as she was about my size. She wore a simply black outfit and I could see her tail swish back and forth as she walked into the room.

"Zena," Lola greeted. "Was Layla a good girl while I was gone?"

"I was," Layla stated as her mother put her down.

"She has a little surprise for you," Zena smiled. Until she saw me.

"What's a human doing here Mommy?" Layla asked and grabbed onto her mother as if for reassurance.

"Layla, Zena this is our new human."

"If I may, where did you get her Mistress?" Zena asked.

"Her eyes are different colors!" Layla apparently got over her fear quickly as she started examining me like one would a cat. She pulled on my clothes and at one point tried to jump on me like I was a jungle gym.

"My brother gave her to me." Lola then explained my false background story. I have to give her this she's a good liar. Though I think Zena was still a little on edge about me as Layla continued to mess with me.

"What's her name?" the child asked.

"Hm. I'm not sure. But if she's going to live here we better figure it out huh?" I think she waited this long just so her daughter could ask me. I gotta admit she was cute.

"Can I name her?!"

"No," I silently thanked her for dismissing that. "Why don't we go with the name her old masters gave her?"

"Alright," Layla sighed. "What's your name?"

"Lea, young Miss," I winged it. I had no clue what else to call her but it sounded alright to me. By the way Lola gave me a secret smile I did it correctly.

"Lea? I like that name. Mommy, can I show Lea the house?"

"Maybe later," Zena interjected. "Remember what you were going to show your mother when she got home?"

"That's right!" She let go of me and grabbed her mom's hand. "I have a surprise for you."

"Do you? Well I can't wait to see it." She motioned for me to follow as she was pulled along by her daughter into what I assumed was some sort of living room and then we stopped in a dining room. There was food all over the table and a few presents wrapped in paper.

"Happy birthday!" Layla smiled at her. "Open your presents Mommy."

"I will," Lola reassured her. "But dinner first. We have to wait for your Uncle Thade remember?"

"But he never comes home this early," Layla whined.

"He will," she assured her. I had a sinking feeling. I could deal with Lola, she was nice and helping me out. Layla didn't seem bad but appeared to be a regular kid. I wasn't too sure about Zena yet but I wasn't getting a bad vibe from her. Thade was a different story. I had no way of knowing his temperament and how to adjust to it. He was one of the apes you had to watch yourself around. I'd have to be careful.

Help

We didn't have to wait too long for said chimp to get home. "Uncle Thade!" Layla did the same to him as she did her mother. "You're home early."

"I promised your mother I would be," he actually had a half non-creepy smile before he placed her gently on the floor. "I see that human is still here." I kept my head down and away from his gaze. To my shock he actually came up and sniffed me. Guess I shouldn't have been too surprised. It wasn't the first time an ape had done this. "At least it smells better. Did it give you any trouble?"

"None at all. In fact she used to belong to someone before they passed. No one else took her in, I was only lucky you caught her before she could turn feral brother," Lola acted like it was normal. "Now I'm hungry. How about we eat?"

I acted innocent by standing at attention near Zena as they ate. I gotta admit the food looked good but I knew one wrong move and I could be dead. I guess Zena was the equivalent of a maid or something. It was only after they finished and opened Lola's gifts that we were allowed to clear the table. Zena led me into the kitchen area. It was as nice as the rest of the house and had a smaller table in there. "We eat in here," she told me.

Zena actually let me sit down and eat with her. She didn't really act like it bothered her at all. I was a little surprised by this considering everyone else's attitude toward humans. But it wasn't like I could speak up. Luckily, I didn't have to.

"I know what it's like," she said after a bit when we were cleaning the dishes. "To be treated with no respect. In front of others you'll have to act as you have but in front of me I don't mind what you do."

"Why?" I couldn't help but ask.

"Apes rule society," she told me. "Monkeys are seen as being less than them. In their eyes we are almost no better than your kind." She didn't say it as an insult but as a fact. "But Mistress is kind to me. She treats me fairly, like an equal. You were lucky she saved you. I can tell she likes you. Just do not let General Thade know."

"He doesn't like humans," I said.

"Yes." We got quiet as Zena was called to bring me back out to the living area once we were done with our chore. Then Layla grabbed onto me and started showing me the house. Zena followed after us seeing as Thade didn't trust me.

The house was actually two stories as I was led up a staircase. "And this is the library, and over here is a bathroom, this is Zena's room, and this is Mommy's room. Here's Uncle Thade's room. I'm not allowed to go in there without permission." She whispered it to me like it was a secret. "This is my room!" she practically dragged me inside the doors. It was a typical little girl's room. Pink everywhere, the bed looked super comfy and had a canopy, toys

were all over the place along with books. A huge closet lined on wall. "Here's where I keep all my dresses," she opened it and commenced to showing me all of them. Then her toys, and basically everything else in her room. "I wonder if Mommy will let you sleep in here with me?"

"We'll have to see young Miss," Zena stated cleaning up as she went. There wasn't much of a point in my opinion.

~*~

Meanwhile downstairs.

"I still dislike this idea," Thade told his sister pacing the floor. She casually sat on one of their sofas.

"You worry far too much," she picked up a book and began reading it. "She was perfectly fine today in the shops. Ask anyone."

"But a human under my roof…"

"It is my roof too brother."

"What would father say?"

"He's had human servants before. And if you're so worried Zena and I will keep an eye on her." Thade couldn't exactly fight her logic as he stopped in front of her with a frown. He tapped the book she was reading until she put it down.

"You know of the human I told you about?"

"The one that took the traps? You cannot be serious Thade. It had to have been some other human. Lea would never do such a thing."

"You named it?"

"Lots of apes name their humans. It's simpler that way."

"Sister…"

"Brother," she countered giving him a small smile he couldn't beat.

"Think of Layla."

"I am. She's always wanted a pet."

"I thought the human was your pet."

"She is until I can be sure Layla can handle responsibility. This will be a great opportunity for her. You won't have to lift a finger. The human will be of no concern to you."

"It will be if she attacks one of you."

Lola let out a long sigh. "I'm not going to argue this with you. You've already given her to me and that's final. You wouldn't go back on your word would you?"

He let out a growl but it didn't seem to be directed at her. "No," he relented.

"Good, now I'm off to bed. Goodnight," she patted him on his shoulder as she passed him.

"At least tell me she won't be sleeping in your room tonight," he called after her. She didn't answer him. "Lola!"

"Goodnight Thade," she called back in a friendly manner.

~*~

Lola came up stairs and announced it was time for bed. Layla fought her mother for a bit but relented. Zena escorted me to Lola's room while my new Mistress put her daughter to sleep. We saw Thade come storming up the stairs and Zena pushed me into the room before there could be a confrontation.

Her room was nice. Green sheets on a large bed. The rest of the furniture matched and there was even a small bookshelf and a couch. I could see Lola in her. It kinda just screamed her.

"Sorry for my brother," she said when she entered the room. I noticed she kept her voice down and I followed her lead.

"It's not your fault. I have to say thank you. For helping me and everything."

She gave me a gentle smile and patted for me to sit next to her on the couch. "I will tell you this now. Things will not be easy for you. I can tell you are intelligent and contrary to what my brother says I believe you humans have souls just like us. I would not be surprised if you wanted to leave. Return to your family and where you came from. I will cover for you if you choose this. Thade knows better than to gloat on certain matters."

She was really willing to do all that for me? Lola was an even better being than I'd made her out to be. She'd deal with General psycho breathing down her neck so I could get away? "Thank you," I patted one of her hands. "But honestly I don't have anywhere to go. The only family I have left is my brother Leo and… I have no idea where he could be." It wasn't a lie. I had no freaking clue where he might be on this insane planet. If he was even here at all. No, I couldn't afford to think like that. I'd find Leo. I just had to have hope and hold out until then. Right now my best beat was staying here with Lola. She and Zena seemed like they'd continue to help me out. Plus, if I wanted information I wouldn't be able to get it out in the jungle running for my life every day. "If it's ok with you I'd like to stay here."

I think Lola got the drift of my situation. Not all of it of course but she was smart enough to see I didn't have a shit loud of options to choose from. "I understand," she placed her other hand on mine. "I'll help you anyway I can. Just act like you have been around my brother and you'll be fine. Now, it's been a long day. How about some sleep?"

Lola explained how I could sleep on the couch in her room. It beat the ground and it was more comfortable than lying in a tree. The events of the day and actually lying on something soft since this entire nightmare began knocked me out like a light. I was just happy at this point I could sleep on the couch. I wouldn't doubt if Thade had his way I'd be on the floor or in a cage. Boy these siblings were polar opposites. But it also made me wonder who the hell their mother and father were for them to turn out like this.

New Job

I usually woke up earlier but I suppose Zena got up even earlier. She came into Lola's room and got me so that we could get breakfast ready and get some chores done before everyone else woke up. The work wasn't that hard and I think Zena was happy someone else was there with her. She opened up a little more and told me how many ape families often had a human or two. The wealthier families had numerous humans but if someone really wanted to show off then they got monkey servants. It meant not only did one have money but that they had enough to not only buy slaves but pay for help.

Though some families preferred monkeys because they either didn't trust humans or used them strictly as pets. Lola was an exception. She genuinely liked Zena and said lemur was happy because she was able to find employment in a respectful house that treated her right and paid her good money. Most apes try to rip off monkeys because they think they're so much better. This planet just seemed stranger to me as time went on.

"Morning Lea," Layla latched onto me when she got up. I wasn't shocked seeing as I got up early at that age too.

"Good morning young Miss," I told her. "Sleep well?"

"Yes," she smiled at me as she went to go sit at the table. "Is Mommy up yet?"

"Not yet," Zena answered her setting the table.

"Good morning everyone," Lola came into the room. She took her place at the table and it was then I learned General Thade didn't often eat breakfast. He more often just grabbed some fruit and took off. He said quick goodbyes to his sister and niece, gave me one final look, and took off. I wasn't complaining.

From there me and Zena were able to eat after we cleaned up. Then I found there wasn't too much to be done. Lola was a stay at home mother and didn't run every day. Turns out there were ape schools but it wasn't the time of year for it. Reminded me of summer vacation. As a result Layla got to run around and play while Lola usually worked on making clothes or reading. Turns out they had other monkey maids who would come in once a week and clean the house so it wasn't too bad for Zena.

I really wasn't sure what I was going to be doing. Until Layla grabbed ahold of me and wanted to play. Lola gave the ok and off we went into the huge backyard. There was another large tree back there and I saw a tiny tree house in it. There was also a jungle gym setup made out of wood. It was neat looking.

"Let's go up here," Layla motioned to her tree house. She was able to just hop up the tree like it was nothing. "Here," she thankfully dropped a rope I could climb up. Inside was a tiny table and chairs. It was roomy though so I didn't have to duck my head. I had to look a sight setting on the chair though. From there it was typical as she wanted to basically have a tea party.

We took a break for lunch and then Layla wanted me to push her on the swing. I did. "This is really fun," she said.

"I'm glad young Miss."

"It's nice to play with someone besides Mommy or Zena. You make funny faces when you pretend."

That got my attention. I wasn't sure but this had to be one of the best backyard playing setups I'd ever seen. Wouldn't other ape kids be all over this place? "What about your friends young Miss?"

"I… I don't really have any," she admitted. It was then I learned a rather interesting backstory. Apparently Lola and General Thade were up in society for a reason. They were direct descendants of an ape other apes worshiped like a God. I nearly choked when she said that ape's name was Semos. I couldn't really wrap my head around it. But she also said that was why she didn't have any friends to play with. Kids either weren't allowed to play with her because she was so important, as the youngest descendant and possibly only line back to him if Thade never popped out any kids. Or it was the opposite and parents wanted their kids to be friends with her for that reason. But Layla wasn't stupid. She knew when the other kids only liked her stuff and weren't honestly interested in her.

I felt bad for her. While my family hadn't been that important or anything I never really had any friends growing up. I acted tough but it got pretty lonely at times. "Young Miss?" I attempted to change the subject.

"Yes?"

"Would you like to hear a story?"

She looked back at me at that. "What kind of a story?"

"Well, this story has a young female chimp in it. She was beautiful and smart and her father was an inventor. But she didn't have any friends either."

"What was her name?"

"Her name was Belle." The rest of the day consisted of me telling her all the stories I grew up with. Only I'd put a chimp in the place of a person. She seemed interested enough and wanted to hear one after the other. She'd never heard of them before. I was just thankful I could remember my own childhood movies well enough to relay them.

When we were called in for dinner she retold the tails nonstop to her mother and Zena. Then when we were done she dragged me up to her room and wanted me to point out the dresses she had that was similar to the ones the maidens wore in my stories. I was just happy to see her excited about something.

Thade didn't make an appearance until later that night after Layla had gone to bed and I was helping Zena finish things up before Lola would turn in. I'm not sure what he did all day but

he never seemed to be in a good mood. Then again, that might just have been when I was around. Then we would all turn in and the routine would continue like that for a couple of days. In all honesty it was getting a little boring but I wasn't going to bitch. Things could be far worse than me playing tea party.

~*~

Until Lola took me to the market with her again. Only this time we stopped by a different place. It reminded me of Bed Bath and Beyond and I wondered if this was where the salon place got all their perfumes and such. "Anya," Lola greeted the older chimp working there.

"Lola," she greeted in the same manner and hugged her. "It has been too long. Ah," she turned to see me. Then she came over and opened my mouth to look inside it. "I see. Yes," she let go of my mouth. "You got yourself a good one here. She'll live a long and happy life. I see it."

"Thank you," Lola stated and flashed me an apologetic look. "How are things going here?"

"Busy as ever. I can barely keep up with the orders now that Mona quite on me. She just had to go run off with that musician."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Lola asked looking around.

"No dear. I'm just venting I'll be fine. All I have to do is find someone else. Her younger sister Nona helps out but she can only work so much with that little one of hers."

"Hm," Lola seemed to think it over a moment. "What if my human worked for you?"

"What?"

"My human Lea," she gestured to me. "She can help out around here until you find someone permanent." I saw what Lola was trying to do and mentally thanked her. I also knew she wouldn't just set me up in a horrible place so this Anya couldn't be bad. Weird but I could deal with that.

"I couldn't. I can't accept charity."

"Don't think of it as charity," Lola countered. "Other apes sometimes send their humans out to work."

"Yes, but they usually need the money."

"I'll give you that but you could still pay Lea, well pay me for her services. Just not as much as you normally would." I could see the gears turning in Anya's head and I think we had her. "I promise she'll work hard and she's quick to pick up on things."

"Alright," the old chimp sighed. "It would save me some money and it'll only be until I can hire someone else."

"I understand. When can she start?" And just like that I had a job. Not a moment too soon. If all I did was hang out at the house like that I think I was going to go crazy. The job wasn't hard. I'd mostly be stocking things and perhaps running out to deliver messages but I'd done that sort of thing back before I graduated high school at my part time jobs.

"Thank you Mistress," I smiled at Lola when we left later that day.

"You're welcome," she replied back.

Theories

Anya was nice enough. Strange but nice. She didn't treat me as anything other than an employee. Her clients were a different matter. They either ignored me, shot me dirty looks, or tried to hassle me. Anya wasn't having any of that crap though. Many of them shut up right quick when they learned who's pet I was.

It was decent work and got me out of the house for a few hours. When I was there I'd look after Layla, help Zena clean, and serve Lola food and drinks and the like. Thade only made appearance early in the morning and late in the evening before we'd go to bed. Life was routine and I found myself getting used to it. But I couldn't help thinking about how this all came about. What planet was I on and where was Leo and Pericles? Also, why was the ape they practically worshipped named Semos? Was it a coincidence? I had no way of knowing. Maybe if I learned the history of this place it would give me some clues. Lola had an enormous library but humans weren't allowed to do much. And I was sure many of them wouldn't be able to read either. Surely general psycho would notice if a couple books were missing. He'd hung out in there a couple times and I think it also qualified as his office. So with little else to do I asked Lola.

"Hm. I see no problem with it," she didn't seem surprised I could read. "You can go in there now if you like and look around."

"What about your brother?"

"If he asks I'll tell him I'm reading the books. All I ask is that you keep them in my room so he can't question it."

"Thank you Lola."

With that I was able to read some of the history of this world. For one I found it was named Ashlar and that this Semos ape was responsible for leading the very first apes. There were a couple references to some other ape but he was never named as being second only to Semos. A few passages mentioned humans but that they were stupid animals that apes needed to control. Nothing else helped but mention of some Calima and that it was where all of this started. But no one went there now because it was off limits.

"Mommy," Layla started one day while Zena and I were tiding up the living room. "Can I go to the market? I really want to buy some more of those apple tarts before Lyn sells them all. Please, please, please."

Lola acted like she was contemplating this for a second. "Well they are delicious. Alright."

"Yay!"

"But someone has to go with you."

"But Mommy…"

"No butts. Why don't you take Lea with you since Zena just went to the market yesterday?"

"Ok, come on Lea," Layla grabbed ahold of me. "Let's go!"

"Yes, young Miss," I smiled as she pulled me along.

We made our way along to the market place. Layla kept ahold of my hand the entire time and kept pointing out things that looked interesting or good. "There's Lyn's cart!" she cheered when we got there. She bought a couple more and we put them in the basket I brought along. "One won't ruin my dinner will it?" she asked me on our way back.

"Your mother told me not to let you eat them yet young Miss," I told her as I looked around. "But I won't tell if you won't," I smiled at her.

"Thank you Lea!" she hugged me and we got a few stares. We stopped for a short while so she could eat one without having to scoff it down. "Here," she broke it in half and gave me it. "You try. It's really good."

I took it and ate my half. "Thank you young Miss," I told her. "It is good."

"Told ya," she giggled as we got back up and on our way. We were more than half way back when we spotted some army apes. "Wait," she tugged on me and we stopped. "Uncle Thade!" she called and waved. Sure enough who was one of the chimps but her uncle? Just great.

She bolted over to him and dragged me along as a result. "Layla," he stated and frowned when he saw me. "What are you doing out here by yourself?"

"It's ok," she told him. "Mommy said I could as long as Lea was with me. We were just on our way home now."

He looked hard at the situation a moment longer before he told his comrades he was taking the rest of the day off. They didn't argue. "I'm taking you home," he told his niece. Without needing prompted I helped her jump up on the back of his horse and followed after them. Thade didn't say anything about it but glanced back at me every once and a while to see if I was still there.

"We're home!" Layla called once we were in the door.

"Brother," Lola greeted us and Zena took the basket off of me. "This is a surprise."

"You always say I don't spend enough time with the family," he stated. "May I speak with you a moment?"

"Yes, Zena would you take Layla and Lea back to the kitchen. I think you all deserve a tart."

"Yes Mistress," Zena said as we went with her.

~*~

"What were you thinking?" he asked her as soon as they were alone. "Letting Layla go off with that human alone."

Lola rubbed her temples at this. "I thought we went over this brother. Lea would never hurt any of us."

"Then what is stopping her from running off? You know how many so called loyal humans I've had to drag screaming back to their owners?"

"If she was going to run away she would have already done so. I've sent her to the market on her own a dozen times and she always comes back promptly. In fact, were they returning to the house when you met them?"

"You've what?" But then he stopped and considered the second part of her question.

"Were they?" she prompted.

"Yes," he answered after a moment.

"Perhaps if you were home more brother you'd know Lea has been performing nicely and keeping your niece company. Layla hasn't been upset once since we got Lea."

"Don't start sister," he looked out one of the windows. "You know how many duties I must attend to every day."

"I know," she patted his shoulder. "Well I'm glad you're here now. Now why don't we go relax and dinner will be ready soon."

Still Thade had his suspicions. That human was hiding something he could feel it. And he'd learned to never doubt his instincts. Plus, as soon as he'd captured her group of humans the traps had been left alone. But he wouldn't act without cause. He didn't want to upset his sister or niece unnecessarily. He'd keep an eye on this human.

Though when an opportunity presented itself it wasn't the one he'd been expecting. It was one of the nights he'd gotten home early. Layla and the human had been playing in her room with the door open. "I'll be back in a minute Lea," he heard Layla call. A moment later he heard a crash from the hallway and peeked out his door. His niece was standing next to a shattered vase and a table had been knocked over. The human came running out in the hall two second later.

"Young Miss!" the human said. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," Layla replied and he could tell she was upset. "I swear it was an accident! I tripped on the rug! Really!"

"It's ok," the human gently moved her away from the broken pieces. "I'm just glad you're not hurt young Miss."

"But this is Mommy's favorite," he could hear her on the verge of tears. "She's gonna be mad at me!"

The human stood there a moment. "No she's not young Miss. I broke the vase not you."

"B-but you didn't."

"Yes I did. Now it would be best if you came downstairs until I can clean this up. But I'll tell her I broke the vase."

"Really?"

"Yes," the human smiled at her.

"Thank you Lea," Layla hugged her.

"No problem young Miss." With that they went down stairs and the human returned later to clean it up. When they ate that night Lola wasn't upset over the vase but glad no one was hurt in the process. Thade kept quiet but couldn't help but look at the human. His niece was too like her mother in being honest to simply blame the vase on the human. But the human had offered to take the blame without being prompted. Which meant she'd been willing to take any punishment Lola could have distributed. Lola was a kind chimp but if she was right in that this human had previous owners were they as lenient? He'd only seen humans as domesticated as theirs after years of training. Some humans bore scares that lasted their entire lives or were so jumpy they nearly peed themselves after an ape talked at them. But he hadn't seen any on this human and she wasn't as jumpy.

Perhaps she'd been born into her position? He couldn't be sure. Whatever the case was she didn't seem as bad as he'd thought. Not if she'd been willing to defend his niece like that.

~*~

Later that night I was cleaning off the table when Thade came into the room. I kept cleaning even though I'd never technically been alone with him before this. I stopped though when I felt him staring at me. "Sir?" I asked him. "Is there something I can do for you?"

He put a tart on the table. "That is for you." And with that he left the room. I stood there a moment longer not really understanding just what happened.

Ari

I had no clue why Thade did that. I wasn't about to ask. Time passed much the same way until Lola asked me to do her a favor one day. "Lea would you please take this letter up to my brother?" It was one of the days Thade actually seemed to have off. "I would but I have to take Layla to see Vena before they close."

"Sure," I agreed. I didn't really want to but how could I refuse such an easy favor after all she'd done to help me? They were off and Zena was busy getting dinner ready so I steadied myself and just did it. I knocked on his door and waited.

"Come in," he said.

I kept my head down like I always did around him when I stepped in. "Sir?"

"What is it?" he quipped at me looking up from the book he'd been reading.

"Mistress told me to give this to you," I handed him the letter and made a quick exit. That was easier than I'd anticipated.

~*~

Meanwhile I finished reading most of the history books they had in the library. So I moved on to other things like a couple books focusing on their religion. Though most of it seemed to overlap with their history. I was shocked so many apes actually believed in this one central idea. A real contrast to humans I know. I asked both Zena and Lola and they agreed that there were only a few other deviations. Mostly apes believed in it or not though some argued about a few things. Like how to worship Semos and there were actually human sympathizers out there. They were few and far between.

I asked Lola if she knew any but she couldn't think of too many. If there were more than a handful out there in this city they weren't being obvious about it. But Lola wasn't that obvious so I did have some hope. A few days later she invited someone over to the house. Her name was Ari and she was the daughter of an important senator.

"Ari," she greeted her. "It's nice to see you."

"Lola," the chimp replied. She dressed a little differently from the others, I suppose it was the closest thing to earthy I'd seen around here. "I don't see Thade anywhere. Out enslaving more humans?" Ok she was really open about this. Also she didn't seem to care that much for Thade. I liked her already. It was then she noticed me. "Who's this?" she looked me over.

"Lea why don't you introduce yourself?" Lola stated. "It's ok. You can be free with her."

"Hi," I said and it felt weird to be speaking so openly to someone outside the family who wasn't Anya. "You already know my name and I know yours so introductions seem a little

meaningless. But it is nice to meet you. I'm no used to speaking openly around someone outside this family so you'll have to forgive me."

"Fascinating," she stated before she asked me a lot of questions. Turns out Ari was openly against the subjugation of humans and often tried to help them. She had a few back at her own house she'd talked her father into purchasing to save them from bad apes who wanted to buy them. Her father wasn't as open as her but he was sympathetic to the humans' plights and often tried to get the senate to make knew laws to help us. But I suppose the senate wasn't all for it even though Ari's father was so high up in the chain of command. I answered as many of her questions as possible but had to kind of skirt around the issue of where I'd come from exactly and how I was brought up.

"Where did you learn to read?" she got around to.

"My mother and father thought me." It was only a partial lie seeing as they helped me before I was in school.

"And where did they learn?"

"They're parents." What was I supposed to say? I came from another world where people are intelligent and you all are in cages in the zoo? I hadn't even told Lola all of this yet let alone Ari.

"Where is your family now? If you don't mind me asking."

"My parents passed on and I… Have no idea where my older brother Leo is. We got separated a while back. But I hope to find him soon. So if you happen to run into a human male a few years older than me with his name would you let me know?"

"Not a problem. I have to say this is a nice talk. You've answered so many questions for me…" She was cut off when we heard the front door open. I shot up from where I'd been sitting on the couch with Lola and immediately went over as If I was getting her more nuts. I made it just in time because Thade walked into the room.

"Ari," he stated when he saw her. "I was not informed you would be visiting."

"I can't stay long," she waved him off and got up. "I just came by for a quick chat. But I must be off. More humans to save from torture you know."

He let out a snarl at that. "I think I've lost my appetite. Let your father know I will see him tomorrow at the meeting," he called after her. She just waved at him as she went out the door. As soon as she left he turned to Lola. "I'll be in my study until dinner."

"That went well," she stated after he'd left. "Thade liked Ari when they were younger," she informed me in the kitchen. "But they took different paths. They say opposites attract but in their case I think the rift is too deep. Too bad. I like Ari."

"I like her too," I stated. I could see where they would clash heads. I was a little disappointed myself. Maybe someone like Ari could get Thade to stop being so uptight. But if Lola

couldn't do that I doubted anyone could really. Plus I think Ari's too in his face about it. A more subtle approach might work. Who knows?

~*~

I was happy though when Lola would send me on errands to Ari's house. Sometimes to deliver food or notes. In return Ari would send me back with food as well or books for Lola to read. I have to say I felt like snickering a couple of times. But I also got a sickening feeling in the pit of my stomach when the humans Ari had in her house looked at me like I was some new species or something. They couldn't read and were astonished at how I spoke so freely with Ari. I didn't fit in anywhere. With apes or my own kind.

I honestly had no clue what to do or how to find Leo. At least now I had a couple pairs of eyes looking for him too. It was better than nothing.

Change

Life was alright for a while. Not exciting but it could have been far worse or boring. I liked my job and I especially liked walking back to the house on my own. I called it my 'me time.' It was the only time I got to myself where I could think. My mind would race with theories of what might have happened to me and where Pericles and Leo could have ended up. Or it ran through what could have happened on this planet. I felt like I was so close to the answer but so far away.

However, one day on my way back I got an interruption. "Hey human!" a young chimp called. I ignored him and his group of buddies as I kept on my way. They were teenagers by the look of them and I'd seen them around enough. If I didn't show any reaction they'd leave me alone. "I'm talking to you," he jumped from the tree he was in so he could be in front of me. His buddies did much the same and I was caved in.

"I'm sorry sir but I have to go home now," I kept my head down.

"You can be a little late," he made me look at him. "Told ya this one had two different eyes."

"Pay up," one said to another.

"Wonder how much your owners gave for ya," he moved my head back and forth.

"More than you can afford," I couldn't help it. After so long I'd had enough and it slipped out.

"Oh," a couple of them said.

"What did you say to me human?" the chimp grabbed my throat and got in my face.

"What is going on here?" I heard a familiar voice and we turned to see Thade on one of his horses.

"General Thade sir!" the chimps backed off right quick. Except for the guy who still held my throat. I think he was in shock.

He jumped off his horse and got right in the lead chimps face. Then he grabbed his arm. "What makes you think you have the right to harm my sister's property?" He must have gripped him pretty hard because he let go of me and I gasped for breath.

"We…Just…" he tried to get out as he was basically brought to his knees.

"If I ever see any of you near this human again I will deal with you personally. Am I understood?"

"Understood, sir," the leader stated as he was let go and basically ran off with his friends.

I glanced over at Thade and wasn't sure what to do. He beat me to it as he came over and examined my neck. "I do not see a bruise forming," he said. "Come," he hoped back on his

horse. "I am talking you home."

I stood there a moment more before I could make my feet follow after him. Had he really just saved me? "Thank you, sir," I told him as I followed. He didn't say anything but did explain what happened to Lola that night.

~*~

The next day after work I received a surprise. "General Thade, sir," Anya said as I was just done. "What do I owe this pleasure?"

"I am here for my sister's pet," he told her. "Is she done yet?"

"Yes, she is. She was just finishing up. Lea!" She didn't have to tell me twice.

"Sir?" I asked. "Is there a problem?"

"No, now come." I kept a few feet behind him as he began walking in the direction of the house. "You may be my sister's pet but you live under my roof. As a result that makes you my problem as well even if my sister does not agree. I would not like to see her upset if something were to happen to you. So as long as she has you doing this favor I will make sure you do not meet the same trouble as yesterday."

My first reaction wasn't gratitude but oh terrific. Now I had him to look forward to after every shift instead of some time alone. Plus there was no way he could be happy about this. He viewed it as a favor to his sister but that didn't mean he couldn't resent it. Or in this case me. My life had taken a turn. I was going to go from not hardly seeing him to having to actually spend time with him nearly every other day. Shit on a stick.

On the bright side other than that little explanation he'd given me he didn't talk much. And no one did hassle me when he was around. I have to admit that was a nice change of pace. Most apes wouldn't touch me because they knew who I belonged to but that didn't mean they kept their mouths shut. Not to mention this meant Thade came home earlier and Lola and Layla were happy about that. Seeing as he wasn't really treating me any different I couldn't bitch.

~*~

It was a short while after this had started that Lola asked Thade to stop in the market on our way home so I could pick up a few things. He wasn't excited but he wasn't about to deny her. So I picked up some pairs and other fruits for dinner.

By this point Thade stood more off to the side so he didn't have to deal with the market crowd. It wasn't like I was going to run for it. I passed by a table that had all sorts of fabrics on it. Layla was just telling me the other day she was going to need a new dress and I wondered if she'd like a blue one. However, as soon as I felt the material my hand was smacked away.

"Off human!" an older chimp told me. "I don't need you dirtying my merchandise."

Thade almost seemed to come out of nowhere and stood next to me in a second. "Is there a problem here?" he asked the merchant. "My pet did nothing wrong."

"General Thade sir," I could see the chimp fumbling over himself. "This human's yours? I had no idea! I see it now. She has two different eyes. Only the best for a chimp such as yourself."

"Yet you dared to harm her when she was purchasing things for my family," Thade got in the guy's face and everyone around us was staring.

"I-I'm so sorry sir! I didn't mean to! Uh…" He actually leaned over and patted my head. Only to have Thade let out a snarl and he backed off quick. "Here!" he thrust the fabric I'd been looking at in my hands. "For you sir! A present free of charge."

Thade looked at it for a moment before he gave it back to me. "It will do. But I suggest you take care of your customers in the future." He began walking away and I followed.

"Come back any time sir!" the chimp called after us. "Only the best for the best!"

I couldn't help but think about how Thade had helped me out back there. And how he'd referred to me as his 'pet'. Maybe it was about him protecting his 'sister's property'. I wasn't going to ask but I was right in how Layla loved the material.

~*~

It was strange. From then on we became pretty popular around the market. I'd been a favorite of some vendors before because they knew Lola sent me but never to this extent. Now whenever we went through there everyone went out of their way for us. They tried to present us with their best merchandise hoping to catch our eyes.

One day oddly a toy vendor caught my interest. I saw a puzzle box on it and took a step closer. But I backed off because I knew Lola and Layla weren't into that sort of thing so I had no reason to get it. Then, to my shock Thade stepped in and bought it. As soon as he did he handed it to me and patted me on the head. I didn't get an explanation but I heard from Lola later it was because I'd been behaving so well. Positive reinforcement. I would have been more insulted if I didn't find I actually enjoyed the thing. Though we didn't let him know I'd figured it out.

From there vendors would always try to get my attention. They'd try to entice me with various foods they thought I'd like or anything to get me engaged. Found out after about a week that if I stared at something for more than a few seconds Thade would just go and buy it like it was nothing. I ended up getting some tarts and more puzzle boxes out of the deal.

I felt like a spoiled pet but I guessed it was better than what nonexistent relationship we'd had before this. Oddly enough walking with Thade became enjoyable and it turned out Lola didn't always have to ask him to go out of the way to the market. On the days we didn't go to the market we took a quieter path home and it was fine with me.

Everything truly changed for me the day a chimp came calling Thade to go see his father.

He Knows

This chimp came to the house one day saying Thade's father wished to see him. Lola stated how Thade should bring me along with him. As she put it, it would be good exercise for me and then on the way home I could pick up some fruit. Plus, I was to give him a picture Layla drew for him. Lola and Layla would have gone too but this was business and they'd see him some other time. I saw between her lines. She knew Thade and I were getting along better. I suppose she wanted to aid in the process. I shared a look with her over Thade's shoulder before we left.

Thade grumbled but brought me along anyway. I suppose the house was at least twenty minutes away. It looked a little more sinister than Lola and Thade's house. It was made more out of what must have been mountain. It was black and everything with it was a shade of red. Obsessive but not horrible. Anya's shop was more chaotic than this place.

I guess as the heir of Semos and Thade's father this chimp was up there in the social realm. There were chimp servants running around along with monkeys and a few humans. Guards were outside but one look at Thade and they let us in. We were led upstairs and I noticed a theme. There were pictures of a religious looking chimp and I think it was supposed to be Semos. I saw a couple pictures in a few of the books I read. Weird but I suppose if you were a descendant of someone everyone worshipped maybe you'd have his image in your house. I had no clue.

Thade stopped us outside the room and glared at me. He hadn't done that in a while but it was just as freaky as before. "My father is very old," he stated. "Be on your best behavior."

"Yes, sir," I kept my head down.

We went into the room and I noticed a very old chimp in the bed across from the door. Behind him were windows and to the side was another picture of Semos along with some weird looking red vase. But the chimp himself was wrinkled more than usual and had white fur. I'd seen a couple of chimps like him before but I think he was the oldest I'd seen so far. He sat up against some pillows and wore robes that made him look important. I could tell he was Thade's father alright. He held the same authority his son did regardless of his age.

"Father," Thade greeted him and put his knuckles to his father's in a way of greeting. I held back and waited to be called upon. "How are you fairing?"

"Better," the chimp stated and his voice was a little hoarse. "How is your sister doing? And my granddaughter?"

"They are fine, father," he answered and I could detect the respect in his voice. "They will visit you soon. But Layla sent you a gift. Lea," he looked at me. "Bring the picture."

"Yes, sir," I answered and stepped forward. I handed him the picture so he could give it to his father. The way that old chimp stared at me reminded me exactly of Thade. It was like he was trying to bore into my very soul.

"This is… The new human I've been hearing about?" he inquired after a few moments.

"Lola's new pet," Thade brushed it off. "If she bothers you…"

"Nonsense," he replied. "I've seen plenty of humans in my time. Just none with two different eyes." He then changed the subject and started talking about the army projects going on. This continued for about half an hour before Thade's father asked for him to go get him something. Thade was going to send me but his father insisted it be him. He didn't argue and went off to go get it before giving me a warning look on the way out.

"Child," he motioned at me. "Come here." I took a few steps closer. "You have no need to fear me. I know what you are."

"I'm sorry sir?" I asked. Now I was confused.

"You came from the stars did you not?" he inquired and caught me off guard. "More will come looking for you. I am sure. You are not of this world."

I froze. How the hell did he know this? "I'm… Not sure what you mean sir," I played it safe.

"You do not need to put on that act for me. And you do not need to refer to me by titles. I must make this fact while my son is gone." He leaned up and put a hand on my shoulder. "I know you are from the stars. My father told me a secret of our origins. As my father did before him. We apes were once slaves to your kind until we became the masters. Few know the truth. Not even my own children know." I stood there at rapt attention. So the apes were like those back on Earth at one point? What changed? "My ancestor Semos as well as one other led an uprising… But Semos left his sons a message. To pass on through the line. If we were ever to come across a human with two different eyes we were not to harm this human. For whoever is this human is important. But it was stressed that this human would come from the stars. You are not like the rest of your kind. You are a friend to the apes, intelligent, and not violent like the others. That is why I tell you this. And I will promise to protect you with my life if it comes to it."

"What about your children?" I managed to ask as millions of other questions swam through my mind. How did this ancestor know who I was? Was it a coincidence? Did it have something to do with the Semos I know?

"I will tell them when my time is near. Lola will understand… But Thade will be a different matter. His hatred runs deep. As it does in most apes. I'm afraid I have not helped over his life. But I will. I will atone for my actions. Your name is Lea is it not?"

"Yes. Lea Davidson."

He put out his hand and I remembered it was a show of submission among apes. I felt like shitting myself after being treated so poorly by most apes over the past weeks. I put my hand on his. "I swear to you Lea Davidson that I, Uros descendant of Semos, will do all within my power to protect you. I only ask on thing in return."

"What is it?"

"When the time comes and your people come for you, as I know they will. Guard my children and my granddaughter. I know of your technology. Our spears and arrows are no match for them. But I wish my heirs spared of this."

"I would never…"

"But those looking for you may. If this does occur do not let them be harmed. I know this will be difficult for Thade but I will try to persuade him otherwise." He coughed after a moment and we heard movement in the hallway. "Promise me," he wheezed out.

I looked into his eyes. I no longer saw the proud ape that had talked to Thade earlier. I saw an old chimpanzee who was afraid for his family. "I promise," I told him.

A Trip

I saw a lot more of Uros after that. Either Thade or Lola and Layla would go visit him. I didn't mind because it was a nice break in the routine. Particularly when he stated how he wished to go on a trip one day. Thade was immediately against it, saying he wasn't in shape to travel. But one hard look and he immediately set about making preparations. Thade was going with him of course, along with Lola, Layla, Zena, and myself. There were also a couple other of Uros' ape servants that were coming too but that was it.

We were headed to some sort of misty mountains to visit one of Uros' old friends. Our caravan wasn't the biggest thing but there was a couple of carriages and horses. Thade would be leading the way while everyone else followed behind. It was debated whether or not I was to be allowed to ride with Uros and the others. Uros halted that argument by saying it was going to be a long ride and I could entertain Layla.

I was thankful I didn't have to walk or ride a horse outside. It began raining the first day into this trip. When we stopped at what appeared to be a tavern I got a chance to see a very wet and pissed off looking Thade. I helped Layla and Uros out of the carriage before I felt bad and went over to help him and the other unlucky servants put up the horses. He didn't say anything but gave me a glance as I helped before we all ran inside the place.

"That will be four rooms sir?" the ape behind the bar asked.

"Yes."

"Very well. Dinner will be served in an hour and your human can sleep out in the barn." He said it so casually I almost overlooked it.

"Mommy," Layla tugged on her mother's sleeve looking at me.

"Oh that won't be necessary," Lola stated. "Lea can just sleep on the floor in our room."

"Sorry Ma'am," the ape was incessant. "No humans allowed. We only allowed her in here because you didn't know our policy."

Layla, Lola, and Zena all looked to Thade. Turns out Uros didn't need to speak up on this one. "You do now," he put an extra coin on the counter. The ape looked between the coin and Thade. By the look on his face I could tell if this guy didn't give Thade the answer he wanted he'd come across the bar and kick his ass. The guy wisely took the coin and shut up.

It was snug but I wasn't complaining. It was better than being out in the rain or that dirty barn. I suppose I should thank Thade at some point. He didn't have to do that. Course he could have been doing it just to appease his sister and niece. I couldn't be sure.

~*~

The journey itself wasn't that thrilling. Long carriage rides where often Uros or I would tell stories to keep from getting bored. I noticed the landscape gradually changed from the lush forest we'd been in to rolling hill country. Day two we hit the rocky mountain terrain. We had to stop once so I could help Layla out of the carriage as she vomited. I couldn't blame her. If I wasn't a pilot with a strong stomach I probably would've hurled too.

That night we reached our destination. We pulled up in front of some sort of rocky looking temple. Instead of apes being here I noticed the inhabitants were mostly monkeys. Mainly baboons. I hadn't worked with too many of them in the past but I noticed how serious these guys were. They were all business and dressed in robes that oddly reminded me of those martial artists might wear.

They helped Uros out of the carriage and seemed mainly interested in him than the rest of us. Though I saw one guy giving an occasional glance at Zena. Uros and Thade went in one direction while we were escorted in another. I'm not sure what they were talking about but we got settled in some nice rooms. They were huge. This time we were given enough rooms I was able to share a room with Zena and actually sleep in the bed. Score one for the baboons.

I also noticed something else. They didn't address me or Zena like we were lower than them. Though them being fellow monkeys for Zena might have been a contributor. It was then I found out why Thade wasn't extremely thrilled to be coming here. Baboons, particularly these ones, viewed everyone as equals. That's why I was being treated as much an honored guest as the rest of them.

Uros and Thade returned later and said they would be out tomorrow visiting someone important. "You all may stay here and enjoy the sights," Thade informed everyone. "Our hosts have agreed to give you a tour of the temple and its gardens."

"That sounds nice," Lola stated.

"Lola?" Uros inquired. "May I borrow Lea tomorrow?"

"Of course father," she replied without hesitation.

"What is this about father?" Thade asked.

"We will be traveling a good distance up the mountain," Uros told his son. "I don't want you dragging me all the way up."

"I wouldn't…"

"I would bring one of my own servants but I'm not sure how my old friend would react to that many apes being on his sacred ground at once. I do not wish to offend him." With that Uros ended the argument and it was agreed I would go with them tomorrow. I escorted Uros back to his room that night while Thade hung back to talk to Lola a minute.

"Tomoko will help you," he told me. I didn't reply. "You will see tomorrow what I mean. I will make sure of it."

"We're here," I told him when we reached his room.

"Thank you," he said to me. "And this is for you," he handed me a book. "Lola informed me you like to read. Just keep it hidden from my son."

I smiled at him in reply before heading back to my own room. Things had sure changed around here. But I couldn't help but wonder who this Tomoko was and how he could help me exactly. Uros spoke of him highly and these baboons were nice. But at the end of the say could they be trusted? I wasn't sure. Maybe it was my instincts but I had the distinct feeling we were being watched. I don't think it was my eyes playing tricks on me as I continued down the hall and saw a shadow move. I stopped a moment and examined it more closely but this late at night I couldn't discern much. I didn't exactly brush it off but kept on my way.

A Fellow Master

The next day I helped Uros with Thade practically two feet in front of us as we continued up a steep slope. I thought we were on the mountain before… This other place was basically on the peak. After what must have been a half an hour hike we made it to another, smaller, temple appearing building. Baboon guards stood out front but I guess we already had the go ahead so we were let inside.

We entered the first room and I saw door much like the sliding doors you'd find in Japan. Strange seeing as the other temple place had regular doors. Uros and Thade were redirected to one room while I stayed behind. Then I was directed to a room opposite the one they'd gone in. I was surprised when I sat down in there. It was decorated with rugs and paintings of baboons doing various, what were probably, martial arts moves. There was a small table in front of me and some hot tea there.

I waited not really knowing what to expect. "Not a fan of tea I take it?" I stopped looking around long enough to see an older looking baboon come into the room. He had on the most decorative robes of the entire place, though they also looked the most worn out. "I don't blame you," he sat down on the opposite end of the table from me and picked up a cup. "It's not for everyone. I am Tomoko. I hope Uros has told you about me."

"He didn't say much other than you could help me," I decided to speak.

"It is not easy getting him away from that brash son of his," the baboon went on. "But I conversed with him enough. He seems to believe you are the one his ancestors spoke of. The human who would fall from the stars. I know Uros is not impulsive or stupid. So," he really seemed to star into my eyes for the first time in the conversation. His eyes were as sharp as ever and peered into my soul. I fought the urge to squirm. "Are you the one his ancestors warned him of?"

"I can't be sure if I'm the same human Uros and his ancestors spoke of. But I did come from another world. That's not a lie."

He stared at me just long enough for me to get uncomfortable again before he answered. "I believe you. Your body language does not indicate you are lying to me. And Uros wouldn't have brought you here if he was not absolutely sure."

"He said you could help me?"

"That depends on what you planning on doing. If you wish to escape from Uros' children we can hide you here. They would never find you. From there we could either keep you here or take you anywhere you wish. Though Uros has informed me you are fine where you currently are. I merely wished to inform you of your options."

"What if I do stay with Uros and the others?" My gut was telling me they were still my best bet.

"If that is the case then we will protect you. It will not be as thorough as it would if you remained with us. But I would assign a guardian to you at all times. You would not have to fear because I would make sure it is someone who can be discreet." We sat for a time in silence as he continued to drink his tea. "Have you made your decision child?"

"I think I'll stay with Uros and them for now. I would appreciate it though if maybe you could keep an eye out for my brother. His name is Leo Davidson. Trust me you wouldn't be able to miss him."

"I will. Is there anything else you wished to ask?"

"I couldn't help but noticed the paintings on the walls. Do you all practice marital arts?"

I actually saw one of his eyes widen at that. "You know of them?"

"Yeah." *I am a black belt after all.* "I've been trained in them."

"Mind showing me some of your technique?"

"Ok?" He moved the table and sat very still as I did the first thing that came to mind. I did an old kata I hadn't done in a while. I was a little rusty but it's sort of like riding a bike. Something you never forget. I think I was able to at least salvage the end and not look entirely horrible. I hadn't exactly had time to train ever since I'd landed on this planet.

Once I was done I took my seat. "In all my years," he finally said. "I have not seen the old ways done by one so young. Only masters who have trained years may learn some of the older methods. Tell me where did you learn this?"

"From my sensei," I answered. "He was from my world as well. You said it was old… Can you elaborate?"

"Techniques change over time," he explained. "Old ways sometimes give way to newer methods. Is this the same where you come from?" I nodded. "So you understand. Let me demonstrate one of our recent katas." He stood up and I wasn't too shocked that he could move as well as he could. My sensei was old but moved like lightning. It made me ready for nearly anything in that regard. Once he was done he joined me once again. "Now you fully understand. But it intrigues me our old ways are similar to yours. Perhaps the arts truly exist throughout the universe."

"I wouldn't doubt it. Truthfully it's nice to see another marital artist again. And to be able to practice."

"It must be hard for you," he told me. "While I do not understand why you choose to continue to hide I will support you in your choice. Not only because of Uros but because you are a fellow master." We stood up and bowed to one another. An oddly familiar and strangely comforting gesture on such an alien world. "May the Great One watch over you sister."

"You as well," I replied. Things had certainly shifted again. This time I had a feeling it was definitely for the better.

Shiva

I was back in the waiting room before Uros and Thade returned. I acted like nothing happened but gave Uros the good news when I escorted him back to his room that night. He smiled and gave me a pat on the hand. We only stayed a few days longer after that. Then it was time to head back home.

We made the long trip back and it rained again. In fact, it rained all the way back. We stopped at Uros place first and made sure his servants had him before we kept on to Lola and Thade's house. I held a sleeping Layla as Zena and Lola got some of their things. The rest we could get later. Thade practically stormed off but I couldn't blame him. He road in the rain all the way home and was probably chilled to the bone. I'd be mad too.

"I got her," Lola took her daughter out of my arms. "Could you go help Thade? Sometimes that armor of his is tricky."

"Ok," I stated and tried to act casual as I made my way to his room. Inside I nearly wanted to jump out of my skin but hell if I was gonna show it. I'd worked with regular apes and monkeys long enough to know you do not show fear. But this was the first time I would be inside his room. Yeah I'd brought him notes and stuff before but that was when he was working in his study. Not his room. Plus, what the heck did I know about removing armor?

I readied myself and knocked on his door. "What is it?" I heard him call from inside.

"Mistress sent me to help you sir," I answered. For a second there was no response and I wondered if he was just going to tell me to go away. But then he opened the door and looked at me.

He didn't look happy but I did notice he had most of his armor still on. "Very well," he sighed. "Come in." He left the door open and moved off as I took a few steps inside. His room reminded me of where his father lived. It was done in mostly blacks and reds but occasional golds. Not as bright as any of the other rooms but it was far from depressing or overtly dark.

His bed was enormous, he had a couch much like Lola, there was some type of mirror hanging on one wall and a door on the other side of the room. I think it was like Lola's and lead to a persona; bathing area. He stood in front of the mirror and motioned for me to come over. He then instructed me how to take off some of his armor. It wasn't as tricky as I thought it would be but it didn't help he was glaring at me like I was going to pull a knife on him or something. I wondered as I was taking it all off how he ran around with it on all the time. I could understand he was stronger than a human but all of this had to limit his movements a little and weigh him down a bit. I'd never seen him with anything else on come to think of it.

Before I knew it I got the arm and chest pieces off. I wondered if I'd have to touch anything else and looked away out of embarrassment. Yeah I'd seen chimp private parts before, it's a price to pay when you work with them. But Thade wasn't an ordinary chimp. Seeing anyone else in the house would be one thing, at least we're all females. But other than the chimps I'd

worked with I'd never seen a males privates before. I sure hoped now wouldn't be my first time.

Thankfully he saved me from it. "I can get the rest," he told me. "Go help my sister."

"Yes sir," I replied and practically ran out the door. Lola later explained she didn't mean for me to become uncomfortable. While her brother did not like humans he did have the decency not to stand naked in front of me. I silently thanked whatever being was out there for at least that factor.

~*~

Things returned to relative normal. Ari would come visit, I would go to my temporary job, Thade would walk me home like always, and from time to time we would go see Uros. I never did see this guardian Tomoko had told me about. Maybe they were as good as he said.

Though things shifted a little when we got a visitor one day. I was coming home with Thade when Layla greeted us at the door as always. Zena did as well and told Thade his cousin was there to see them. Some chimp named Shiva. Zena then redirected me to the kitchen. I only caught a glimpse of a female chimp completely dressed in black with a stern expression on her face. From the look of it neither Lola nor Layla were enjoying her company. Her voice reminded me of my second grade teacher.

Zena told me quietly that Lola and the others didn't really get along with Shiva. That was why I hadn't heard of her until then. I guess Uros had a younger sister who'd passed in giving birth to her. She was then raised by a really strict religious father. I was told how she followed after him in that she was a minister that preached her ancestry. That was one reason Thade and the others didn't exactly invite her over. She was constantly on them about how great Semos was. In fact, we got to hear a little bit of it as voices got louder.

"I'm simply saying you should think of settling down," Shiva told them and I think she meant Thade. "We've been over this before cousin. I cannot contribute to the family tree for purity reasons."

"Yes, as you keep preaching," Thade countered.

"If you do not find a nice chimp to settle down with you understand the implications this could mean for our family. Our bloodline has grown far too thin as it is. We are the only remaining descendants of the great and noble Semos. If you do not have children young Layla will be the only one left to carry on the bloodline."

"You say that as if it's a bad thing."

"You know what I mean," she practically spat out. "Now Semos forbid something should happen to her but if that were to happen…"

"I would rather you left my niece out of this," he growled back.

"Layla honey," Lola spoke up. "Go into the kitchen and have Zena and Lea fix your something."

"Yes Mommy," I could hear her practically run to the kitchen to get away from the argument. I couldn't blame her.

"If she dies then our line dies with her," Shiva kept on. "You know our ancestors were always wise enough to have two children. You and Lola are proof of that. Due to unfortunate circumstances that did not occur with myself nor Lola. Unless she remarries or you settle down our entire house falls on the shoulders of one single little chimp."

"I will settle when I am good and ready," he stated.

"You've said that for years. You are getting past your prime Thade. The wise decision would be for you to marry now. What of that Ari girl I keep hearing about? Maybe if you marry her that infernal human activist will finally shut her tongue."

"I do not remember you being in a position to order me," I wondered if Thade got right in her face when he said that. I heard a few shrieks of anger from both sides before Lola's calming voice broke the tension.

"Shiva," she said. "Thade will marry when he wishes. It is not something he can be pushed into. Now it was lovely seeing you but I'm afraid you must be off. You do not wish to delay your pilgrimage any longer do you?"

"You are right cousin," Shiva finally answered. "I must be going. However, I ask you to head my words. And if you ever seek out another mate Lola I know of a decent chimp of high standing that would be perfect for you." I heard them heading for the door. "Oh and while it is not my place to say how you run your house if you are going to keep a human then it should be outside. With the other animals." She practically slammed the door after her. At that point it was like the entire house let out a sigh of relief. I didn't know much about Shiva but she gave me a bad feeling, and not simply because of what she said. However, I suppose I wouldn't have to worry about her seeing as she was going out to spread the religion to various cities. I just hoped I'd never have to, nor my brother when I found him, face her.

A Peek

As time continued on I found something strange. Most apes didn't like humans and considered us beneath them. At least that's what I originally thought. Of course Lola and the others I knew well were exceptions. But I discovered some interesting bits of info as I was able to move around a lot. There were a few times Lola would send me out of the house, she knew that I wanted to be alone at least a little. Normally I'd run errands or go to the market. That's where I found out not everything is what it appears to be.

It started with small things. Like one of the market apes I saw nearly every day would give me a pastry or something along those lines. At first I thought they were being nice or wanted me to favor them so that I'd get Lola or Thade to buy something from them later. But that wasn't the case. I found it out one day when I saw a human being beaten in the street. I suppose by 'their' ape. I wanted nothing more than to stop it but I couldn't. My fist was shaking I was so mad. The chimp gently grabbed me when he saw what was going on. "Come," he told me. "You don't need to see that." He genuinely sounded upset about it.

"That's no way to treat anyone," his wife said as I was directed to their house, aka their store. The house part was in back and I'd never seen it before. "Human or ape."

"Shhh," her husband told her looking around. As if someone was listening in from the store part. Highly doubtful seeing as they'd just closed. I'd only come by to get a package of beat root. "Don't let anyone hear you."

"I don't care if they do," she countered and they sat me down at a table. "It's wrong. I was practically raised by a human. They're no different from us. Well, except from the hair." She pulled out a bowl and ladled food into it. "Here you are," she handed it to me. "This will make you feel better."

"I'm sure Lola feeds her," her husband sighed as he took his own seat.

"I'm not saying she doesn't," she countered. "But you never know with that Thade running around."

"That's General Thade dear," he stated and began eating his own portion.

"General or not he's just a chimp like us," she sat down as well. "Go ahead and eat," she told me. "You don't want it to get cold." I wasn't sure what to make of the experience. But as I got to know some of the apes in the surrounding area more I learned not all of them were exactly against humans. I met a few more couples like them. They'd treat me like an equal when no one was around. Turns out they were afraid of repercussions. Unlike Ari they didn't have a high up father to protect them if they spoke up. There were plenty of apes out there that didn't like humans and they were open about it. Plus the scary military presence basically over their heads wasn't helping.

It wasn't much. Things wouldn't change for good unless these apes spoke up and grew a back bone. However, it was a start. And it opened my eyes. That meant there were more potential

allies out there. I'd just have to find them.

~*~

Meanwhile things changed in the house as well. I was making one of my rounds about the house. Cleaning things up and whatnot. I was in the library putting books away when I got a nasty shock. Thade waltzed into the room and my heart nearly stopped. He wasn't supposed to be home for three more hours.

I didn't know what to do so I froze mid putting a book on a shelf. I must have been a sight as I had three books in my other hand and I was tiptoeing trying to put this one away. He stopped a moment in the doorway like he hadn't expected to see me here either. I couldn't tell from his expression if he was surprised or angry. Sometimes it was hard to tell with him.

"Uh hello sir," I stopped and put them on a nearby table. "Mistress told me to put these away. But I don't know where they all go." It wasn't a total lie. "I'll go now."

"I already know," he stated and I stopped mid step. *What did he know exactly?* He casually walked over and looked at the books on the able. He even picked up the one I couldn't reach to put away. "Lola is an avid reader but even she doesn't read this much. Nor has she ever taken an interest in history." He looked at me then but I didn't see any anger. "You have been reading these books." *Oh crap this could get really bad.* "I could see why Lola did not tell me of this. I've never been a fan of smart humans. But you have not done anything to warrant punishment and I think you're clever enough not to test me. I don't care what you do in the free time my sister gives you, as long as it doesn't hurt any of us." He reached up and put the book on the shelf for me.

"Thank you sir," I told him.

"Your previous owners must have cared a great deal for you," he patted my head. "If they taught you how to read." He then turned and went to his desk. "Call me when dinner is ready."

"Yes sir," I replied standing there a moment longer. Maybe I'd underestimated those under the same roof.

Work

I was said when Anya finally found someone for the position. But she did tell me that as soon as a spot opened she'd let me know. Or if she needed some extra help around the place. I'd miss her and the partial freedom I had when I was working. Now I was stuck in the house more often then I liked, and Thade didn't have to walk me home. I wasn't sure why I felt a twinge of sadness at that. Plus I got bored fairly quickly now that I was home all day. Unless Lola sent me to the market, but there were only so many things the family needed.

"Thade," Lola spoke up one day during breakfast. "Why don't you take Lea with you to work?" I nearly dropped the bowl I was holding and Thade simply looked at her.

"You cannot be serious."

"I don't see how it would be a problem," Lola countered. "Lea listens to you and doesn't cause problems. Plus she needs more exercise and fresh air. It would only be for the day."

Thade let out a low growl but surprised me by not fighting with her too much. "Fine but only for today."

"Thank you brother."

I'll admit I was a little curious as to what it was exactly he did all day. I followed him to a rather busy building where apes and gorillas all wore military uniforms. He passed by and when he did the others would stop and salute him. They gave me a few looks but didn't comment. I did notice some other officials had humans with them as well.

We walked up some stairs until we reached the third level. There were fewer rooms up here and I think they were all offices. We got to his and I did note how big it was. Plus there was even a small balcony. I wondered if he got special privilege because he was a general or because of his heritage. Maybe both.

He sat behind his desk without saying much and I noticed he had a lot of paperwork. No wonder he often took work home with him. I wasn't exactly sure what I could do in this situation. "Is there some way I can help you sir?" I offered.

He glanced up at me and I could see the wheels turning in his head. "Well… Since you can read you can sort these out. Reports in one pile requests in another."

"Yes, sir." I was basically playing secretary but as long as I wasn't bored or doing regular chores like at home. It took up most of the day and I had to go run out to grab or hand off a file a few times. It wasn't overtly hard work but it kept me busy. I was a little shocked to see most of his work was finishing and signing off on paperwork. Although by the end of the day the piles had been sorted and he looked at them. "There's a report on a water shortage in the Luma village," I told him. "I figured that was more important than the orange shortage Venu had going on. Also someone by the name of Sua requested more troops for the night patrols while Sargent Trep stated he recruited ten more apes for his division."

He briefly glanced at the papers before returning them to their piles. "Good work," he patted me on the head. "They can wait until tomorrow. Let's go home."

~*~

I was a little surprised when he told Lola he'd take me to work with him again. Just until he caught up on all the paperwork the Senate had been shoving down his throat as he put it. I wasn't going to complain and Lola only nodded while smiling.

This continued for about a week. I noticed chimps would often come to get Thade's approval on nearly anything and they all really respected him. This one particularly large gorilla, who I learned was called Colonel Attar, was Thade's second in command. He visited the most. He seemed surprised I was there but didn't comment on it as I just kept doing the paperwork as they talked.

It was my turn to be shocked the day I came in and noticed a smaller desk and chair off to one side of Thade's desk. He didn't comment on it but took his seat as usual. I decided not to say anything but smiled. It was far better than sitting on the sofa. A voice in the back of my head told me it wasn't a big deal but I took it as a good sign. We didn't talk much when we worked unless I had a question on a certain report or Thade needed me to go get something. But much like when we walked home I didn't find the silence awkward. It was peaceful and I enjoyed organizing. Weird hobby I know but hey I liked it.

~*~

One day Attar came in as usual and Thade stopped working when he saw the look on his face. "What is it old friend?" Thade asked him.

"Sir there's a problem in sector five," he glanced over at me but I ignored it and kept working.

"Go on," Thade prompted him.

"It's the humans sir." They talked about how the 'wild' humans in that region had been stealing food from the local farmers. 'Domestic' humans from that area had also been disappearing at an alarming rate. I acted like none of it bothered me and that I wasn't hearing any of it. I couldn't let them know I was secretly happy about what was going on.

~*~

News kept coming in like that more often. The Senate wasn't happy about it and kept breathing down Thade's neck saying the military wasn't doing its job. I sort of felt bad for Thade. He may have been in charge but that didn't make him responsible for everything that was happening in the area. I could see the stress was getting to him by the way he sat.

If he was semi relaxed he would lean back in his seat a little and scratch his chin now and then. If he was really focused on something he'd lean up a bit and use both his hands to hold the document. When he was ticked off he'd sit basically upright and lay one hand on the desk. These days he sat so straight I wondered if it hurt his back. He currently gripped a document

so hard I thought he was going to rip it. He let out a snarl, slammed it down, and then pinched the bridge of his nose.

I knew I should just go on as usual and keep my mouth shut. I should secretly route for my brethren and leave Thade and the apes to have their freak out. But for some reason it bothered me to see him like this. Maybe it was because he'd never personally been mean to me. Or perhaps it had to do with how his attitude would eventually weigh on Lola and the others. Yeah that had to be it. Sure.

"Sir?" I asked. "Are you alright?"

"Fine," he replied not even looking over at me. "Go back to work."

I decided to be a little bold. "Sir, maybe you should take a break. You're too stressed over this."

"Of course I'm stressed!" he banged his hand down on the desk so hard I was surprised it didn't crack. "The Senate keeps saying the military is inadequate to handle the human population!" he stood up from his desk and began pacing. I noticed that was something else he did when he was worked up. "How would they know about the human situation when none of them have ever left the city to see for themselves? I cannot afford to take a break," he turned and looked at me. He was angry but the anger wasn't directed at me. "Unless I find a solution soon our funding will be cut." I let him rant. Sometimes people, or apes, needed to let steam out. Thade didn't appear to be one to hold back but he tried to exert some self-control in front of his subordinates. But he didn't have to with me. I waited until he was done and sat back down in his seat before I spoke again.

"Perhaps you could show them," I offered. "Like you said how will they know what the problem is simply from reports? You and your men are out in the field every day not them. And from the reports I read this little situation is nothing serious. Human uprisings and disappearance are at an all-time low. The lowest in five years to be exact. Colonel Attar let me borrow some of the old statistical reports. They back me up. I do not know how this Senate works but if they wish to complain about something maybe they should worry more about the drought hitting sector nine and what possible solutions could be done there."

Thade stared at me long and hard. So long in fact it made me a little uncomfortable. I thought I'd overstepped my bounds when his posture relaxed a fraction. "You…" his expression softened a bit. At least he wasn't frowning now. "You have a valid argument. Let me see those old reports." I handed them over and he double checked the numbers. "You're right," he said after a while. "Records are at their lowest in five years. As for sector nine we could redirect water from sector seven…" He looked over at me again.

He slowly reached out and put his hand on my head. Instead of the usual quick pat it lingered for a few moments. "You are a smart human," he messed around with my hair a little. "A smart human indeed."

~*~

The next day Thade left me in his office to continue working as he went and made a proposal to the Senate. I hoped it worked. Though I was startled when he came back into the office and was lightly smiling. "Sir?" I stood up from my desk. "Did the meeting go ok?"

"Better than ok," he clapped a hand on my shoulder. "The Senate agreed and even gave us an extension on expanding sector three five more miles." His hand stayed on my shoulder and he looked at me with a smirk. It was far better than the neutral or scowling expression he normally wore. "Come Lea," he said. "We are going to celebrate."

"What about work sir?"

"Work will be here tomorrow," he gently led me to the door. "And you," he let go of my shoulder to pat my head. "Deserve a reward."

"A reward? Sir I don't…"

"Of course you do," he stated like it was nothing. "You've been a very good human. I'll even let you decided what your reward will be."

"M-me?" I stuttered.

"Yes. Now name what you would like. Anything and I'll get it for you."

"Anything sir?" I wanted to be sure.

"Yes. All you have to do is tell me."

I thought about it for a moment. Material items didn't interest me in the slightest. And something told me if I came out and blatantly asked for my freedom he wouldn't like that. Not like he'd let me go… So what the hell did that leave me? "Um. May I think it over sir?" I inquired.

"Take all the time you need," he still held a smirk as we walked down the hallway.

No More Tears

Thade's good mood lasted for a few days. And he wasn't nearly as stressed out as he'd been. All the while I still kept thinking about this 'reward'. I was no closer to giving him an answer. I could read any book I wanted from their library so it wasn't like I wanted to buy more. Plus Ari kept letting me borrow hers from time to time. I didn't want for anything else. Except my freedom but that wasn't happening.

I wasn't surprised when Thade asked me a week later at work if I'd made up my mind. I hesitated before I answered. "I'm not sure… If you can grant this request sir."

He tilted his head in thought. "Go ahead. What is it?"

"I would like to find my brother sir. We were separated a while ago and I…" I swallowed the lump in my throat. "I miss him."

He stared some more before he spoke. "You have a brother?"

"Yes sir. His name is Leo and he's older than me. He's… All the family I have left."

"Give me his description and when you last saw him," he replied.

"Really sir?" I inquired.

"I told you I'd get you anything you wanted." I described Leo and lied about where I'd last seen him. I told him I'd last seen him in the jungle before I was captured. "I'll look into it," he informed me.

"Thank you sir," I kept my head down and fought not to cry. I missed Leo so much and worried about him. Where was he? Was he alright? Was he somewhere else on this planet? If so was he running free or in a situation like myself? If he was I hoped he'd found someone like Lola or Ari to help him. I knew my brother could be stubborn and I wasn't entirely sure he had as much patience as I did to lay low.

~*~

Weeks passed. Thade and everyone else didn't have any leads on my brother. There was no human with his description or name running around the city or neighboring sectors. For all I knew he could've been running around the woods like the other humans I'd seen.

I tried to keep a positive attitude about the entire situation. I wanted Leo and even Pericles to be safe out there somewhere. But as time drifted on I couldn't help but have doubts. Even if they were safe where ever they ended up I might not ever find them. It was a big planet. And there was no guarantee the storm had even landed them in the same location I had. What if they were somewhere out there in the galaxy? If that was the case I dearly hoped they'd somehow made it back to the Oberon. Then I'd be the only one stuck on this messed up world with an ironic fate.

But this depressed the shit out of me. What if I never saw my brother again? We'd already lost our parents. Leo was all I had. But there was the possibility I'd never get to hug him, bug him, or tell him I loved him again.

I continued on as normal but I couldn't help not being as energetic as before. Don't get me wrong I got my work done in a timely manner. But I didn't feel like much reading in my free time and playing with Layla wasn't as fun as it normally was.

~*~

"Mommy?" Layla tugged on her mother's shirt sleeve. "What's wrong with Lea? I tried asking her why she was so sad but she wouldn't tell me."

"It's… Really personal honey," Lola informed her as Lea fixed dinner with Zena in the kitchen. "Lea misses her brother very much."

"How can we cheer her up?" her daughter asked.

"Just act normally and give her a few hugs," Lola instructed. "Lea doesn't need to be reminded of why she's sad and she doesn't want us to pity her."

"Ok."

~*~

Thade stopped and happened to glance out one of the windows. Outside in the backyard Layla and Lea were playing. They sat at a small table while Layla poured some sort of drink into a cup. Lea acted happy and thanked her. Layla bolted up and shouted something about forgetting fruit before she ran off telling Lea to stay put. Lea smiled until his niece ran into the house. Once she was gone Lea's face turned to one of utter sadness.

It made Thade keep watching. Even when she'd first been captured he hadn't seen her like that. She looked haunted and she slumped a little like the weight of the world was on her shoulders. He thought she was small before. In a position like that she appeared barely larger than his niece. He heard her sniffle but quickly wiped her face and fixed herself when Layla came back into the yard. She wore a bright smile once more but even from where he stood he could tell it was false.

"What is wrong with the human?" he asked his sister later that night. "Is she ill?"

Lola made eye contact with him and it reminded him of when they were young. She was saying, 'How stupid are you?' "What do you mean?" she verbally inquired.

"I've noticed she does not appear to have as much energy and seems depressed," he stated. "Do we need to call a vet?"

"No," Lola didn't snap but she narrowed her eyes. "She misses her brother. I thought that would be obvious."

"I have looked for this human but haven't been able to find him," Thade answered. "She will just have to ask for something else."

"She did not ask for something," Lola's tone did take a sharp edge. "She asked you to find her family Thade. It is completely different."

"I don't see how," he sneered back at her. "Humans are property Lola. Remember that."

"I don't believe you," she got within a foot of him. "Lea is a part of this family."

"She's a human. A pet. Our property," he said.

"When did you consider her to be 'your property' as well?" Lola questioned. "Last I heard she was 'my human'." She let out a long sigh. "I know you do not care for humans Thade. But Lea is clever and she has feelings like we do. I would feel the same if I were in her position. Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you want to find me? Or Layla or father if we were taken from you? Lea hopes one of us will be able to find the only family she has left in this world since she cannot look herself. She has every right to be depressed because as the days pass her hope is slowly diminishing. All we can do for her is to keep searching and try to keep her hope alive."

Lola turned and began walking out of the room. "You say she's only a pet Thade," she faced him. "But I don't believe that. And I wonder if you do either." She left him with his thoughts.

~*~

Thade didn't really talk much the next few days at work. Not that I really minded. It was easier for me to keep my mind busy than dwelling on things I couldn't change. By now I'd like to think I got used to Thade and his mannerisms. But when he snarled and banged his fist lightly on the table seemingly out of nowhere it still startled me. He looked at me when I jumped and rubbed his head lightly snarling. "You…" he started but stopped.

"Yes sir?"

"I have not had any luck finding your brother," he told me. I couldn't help it as I slumped a bit.

"That's ok sir. Thank you for trying," I felt partially defeated. I suppose it was a miracle he'd tried this long. I wanted to stay strong. I really did. But this was all more than I could take. I was on an alien planet, being treated as a pet, and might never see my brother again. I held back the tears; I didn't want to cry in front of anyone. Most importantly Thade. But I couldn't help it as some leaked out and a sniffle came out. "Sorry sir," I apologized and hated how squeaky my voice sounded.

"I'm not finished," he told me and I felt him pat my head. I barely looked up at him. "I will continue to search for him. I promised you after all." He didn't say anything for a while but continued to pet me. "It… Will be alright. You have us… And we will find your brother. I will find your brother. There is no need for tears." I couldn't help it as I just kept staring at

him. "I like it better when you are smiling as does my sister and niece. So I do not wish to see you like this again."

I think this was his attempt at comforting me. I didn't think he was really capable of this. But if there's one thing I know it's not to expect anything around here. He didn't look at me but did kept gently patting my head. Seeing all of this threw me for a loop emotionally. I went from crying to smiling like he said. "Thank you sir," I said. "Thank you so much."

"Hmph," was his answer as he kept petting me. Normally it would've begun to piss me off by now but after what he said I didn't mind.

Fever

It happened so suddenly none of us were prepared for it. Some type of virus was going around and it was spreading fast. I didn't have to worry much because it only seemed to affect the apes. But that didn't mean I was out of the woods yet. I had all of my 'adopted' family to worry about.

My worst fears were realized when Thade starting showing the symptoms. He would occasionally cough but when I asked he brushed it off as nothing. Next he most likely had a fever, but he never let me close enough to tell for sure. Then came the weakness. He was only one of a number of apes would couldn't find the strength to get out of their beds.

I acted as quickly as possible and got the others the hell out of there. They were to stay with Uros for the time being, seeing as none of his servants or he was sick. Lola didn't want to leave her brother and I understood but at the same time I told her how Layla needed her and that I'd stay with Thade and see him through this. I would be handling everything myself expect I'd have food and such delivered to the house for me.

For a while nothing much happened. Thade would lay in bed while I got him anything he needed and kept an eye on him. But one day his fever got really bad. That's when he started the mumblings. At first I couldn't make anything out. After a couple hours though his voice rose and he somehow managed to articulate better. "Lola…" he said. "Layla," he kept repeating their names as if they were right in the room.

I kept a cold washcloth on his head at all times. "Lea," I finally heard my name. Though I found it a little odd seeing as he rarely ever said my name when he was awake. He went quiet for so long I thought he drifted back to sleep on me. Turned out not to be the case though when I returned from being him more water to see him staring right at me. His gaze was a little clouded and I didn't think he was all there. But I steadied my nerves and approached him with a smile.

"Hello sir. Are you hungry? I could make you something…" Before I could move he reached out and grabbed my arm.

"No," he said and his voice sounded a little horse like his throat was hurting him. "Stay."

"Of course sir," I pulled the chair I'd been sleeping in closer to the bed. We stayed like that for a long while. Not once did he let go of my hand. At least he wasn't staring at me anymore, his eyes seemed to focus on the ceiling for some reason. But he eventually ran out of water.

"Where are you going?" he demanded as I got up.

"To get you more water sir," I gently tried to get him to release my arm. His grip held firm and increased a little.

"No, stay here."

"I'll only be a minute," I attempted to pry his grip off me but that wasn't working.

"I said stay here!" he jerked me a bit. Now working with apes before I got handled a few times roughly by them. So while this wasn't exactly new I still was a little worried over how he was acting. It was hard to gage him while he wasn't in his right head.

"You're hurting me," I pointed out as his fingers started digging into my skin. If he'd wanted to he could've ripped my whole arm off. Luckily that statement seemed to sober him a bit because he released me. I couldn't tell what the look on his face meant as he went back to staring straight up. "I'll be right back," I assured him anyway.

~*~

He remained calm the rest of the day. Although at one point I did have to lean him up so I could fix the pillows underneath him before he went to bed. I might be small but I'd handled enough chimps in my day that he wasn't that big of a problem. "There you are sir," I pulled one more pillow under him. But I did think of how weird this situation was. Thade was so proud and strong. Now he needed me to do nearly everything for him. Except help him to the bathroom somehow he managed that on his own.

I didn't have any real warning before he grabbed me again. Only this time he snatched me around my waist and practically pulled me onto the bed with him. I'm not sure where he found the strength. Maybe it was his delirium or I really was that light to him. All I managed to get out was a tiny squeak before he reversed our positions so I was underneath him. I looked up into his tired and not all there expression. I'd never been in a situation remotely like this one and had no way to prepare for it. "S-sir?" I got out.

"Stop talking," he half snarled. *What's he gonna do?* Then his expression softened a small fraction as he moved some hair out of my face. He shifted around a little, rested both arms around my waist, and rested his head down on my chest area. I froze and just stared at him. But he didn't move or say anything after that. A few minutes later I could hear him lightly snoring.

I attempted to slowly make my way out from under him but when I moved his arms tightened their hold and he snuggled closer. I was stuck. I didn't want to wake him up and make him angry. In his state I had no idea what he could do. And it wasn't like he was hurting me or anything like this. Was I still freaked out and uncomfortable with him sleeping on me? Oh hell yeah. But I sighed when I knew things could be far worse. Instead I made myself as comfortable as possible and drifted off myself.

Talking In Your Sleep

I awoke slowly and nearly panicked when I saw Thade lying on top of me. But then I remembered and kept myself calm. No sense in waking him up. But I really needed to get out from under him. I had stuff to do and had to use the bathroom. It took a lot of effort and patience on my part but I was able to shift one of his arms enough for me to slide out from under him. Lucky for me his grip had loosened in his sleep.

I did what I needed to do and was on my way back when I heard him yelling. "LEA!" I heard him and he sounded pissed. "Where are you?!"

"Sir?" I burst into the room and set down the supplies. "What are you doing out of bed?!" He'd somehow managed to grab one of his bed posts and stand there. "You need to get back in bed now." I went over and attempted to help him.

"Where were you?" he groggily asked me as I led him to sit back down.

"I had to go get more food and water for us," I answered and went to put the sheet back on him. "If you wait here I'll get you a washcloth." But he grabbed me again. "I promise I'll be right back sir. But unless you let me work you won't get any better."

I saw a flicker of recognition in what I'd said. "Very well. But hurry back." Who knew Thade got clingy when he was sick? At least now he let me do what I needed to do. But Thade's fever wasn't breaking. Usually in a situation like this I'd take a nice bath. But… I didn't think Thade could get in and out of the tub by himself. Eh. That meant… Oh crap. Well not like I hadn't seen a chimps privates before but… I wasn't looking forward to it.

I got the tub ready and helped him move to the bathroom. It was pretty nice and matched his room with a tub big enough to hold three people. "What's going on?" he questioned looking at me.

"I thought a bath might help you sir," I answered. "But we need to get your… Clothes off." *Come on Lea you're not five. You can handle this.*

For a moment he stared at me like I wasn't the one making sense. "You will do this?"

"I'm the only one here to help you so yeah." I gulped as I took off his shirt and looked at his pants. Right as I worked up the nerve to grab the waist he held my hands. I looked up and couldn't tell what he was thinking by the look on his face.

"You may have to help me but…" He stopped and looked around. He ended up picking up his discarded shirt and ripped a piece off. Then he put it over my eyes and made it into a blindfold. "Now you do not have to see what you do not wish to."

"Thank you sir," I told him. He managed to take care of his pants and I only had to hold his arms to help him into the tub. Once he was submerged I was able to take off the blindfold. I set to work bathing him, though I didn't have to do his lower half and looked away while he

did it himself. I waited until the water started going cold to help him out. We repeated the process while I wore the blindfold and I waited until he had a new set of pants on before he told me I could take it off.

I changed the sheets before I placed him back in bed. He instantly fell onto it and looked exhausted just from what he'd done. He gasped for breathe and I put another washcloth on his forehead. "Lea," he looked up at me.

"I'm here sir." He held out his hand and it was shacking. I took it without thinking.

"Stay with… Me."

"I'm not going anywhere," I smiled at him. He then opened his arms for me. "Uh," I hesitated not really knowing what to do. I could say no and deal with whatever happened. Best case he was too tired to move. Worst case he'd throw a fit and do who knows what.

"Please Lea," he actually said. Now I knew he was out of his head.

"Ok," I couldn't help but let out a sigh. I decided to role with it, especially since he was sick and giving me a pathetic look. Plus I didn't want him going crazy on me. I slowly sat down and he gently pulled me into his embrace. He was a little sweaty but not so much as to get on me. He kept running his hand through my hair. He was being so weirdly nice I wasn't going to complain. But I was a little worried. Would he remember all of this when he got better? If he did would he throw a fit over it? I hoped not. While this version of Thade freaked me out somewhat it wasn't that bad of a change.

~*~

I woke up this time to him holding me instead of lying on top of me. Nice difference. Thade's fever got a little better but his attitude stayed roughly the same. He wouldn't let me get out of the bed for much, only food, water, and to use the bathroom. It's not like we did anything, thank goodness. The most he would do would hold me, sleep on me, or run his hands through my hair.

Life was simple and surprisingly… Nice. Weird I know but it was good to slow down for a change. Though I knew it wasn't going to last forever. But for now I'd enjoy this.

Plus Thade talked in his sleep. He'd mumble most of it but occasionally I got something. "Lea," he would say and hold me tighter. "Stay here," he was starting to thrash a little. "No. Don't leave."

"Sh," I told him and held him to me. "It's ok. I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere." He settled down and went back to sleep. I couldn't help it. He looked peaceful when he wasn't mumbling.

~*~

I was thankful his fever broke the next day. And I could tell he was feeling a little better. Mostly because when he woke up and saw me underneath him he had a confused look on his

face like, 'How the hell did she end up here?' He didn't say much after he released me and I got to go about my business. He even waved me away a few times when I tried to help him.

"I'm glad you're better sir," I smiled at him cleaning up that night. "Everyone should be able to return to the house after it's been thoroughly cleaned."

He didn't look at me and I brushed it off thinking he'd ignored me. But on my way out the door carrying his old clothes he spoke. "Lea," he said and I turned in the doorway.

"Yes sir?"

"Did I…" he stopped and it was like he was battling the words to come out of his mouth. "While I was not well… Did I do anything to you?"

"What do you mean sir?"

"Was I inappropriate with you?" he actually didn't meet my gaze on that one. So that's why he was acting so distant. Guess he couldn't remember much about being sick after all.

"No sir," I reassured him with a smile. "The most you did was grab my arm but no harm was done." I didn't want to add how he used me as his personal pillow for three days. He looked uncomfortable enough and it's not like the experience mentally scarred me or anything. "Call me if you need anything. I'm going to go wash these clothes." I got a grunt and nod out of it. Yeep he was back to his old self. I should've been relieved. So why was it I felt a twinge of sadness too?

~*~

Thade stared at the door long after Lea walked out. He was thankful he'd not harmed her. He knew he'd been out of his mind with illness. He could only remember bits and pieces. Most of them involving the human. She seemed to always be there. One memory burned in the front of his mind.

For some reason she was leaving the room and he hadn't wanted her to go. So he remembered grabbing her arm as she attempted to get away. "You're hurting me," she'd said. He wasn't sure why but he felt. Were those the pangs of guilt? Ridiculous he'd captured and sold off how many humans over the years? He'd also had to kill so many of them he couldn't possibly keep track. It never bothered him and he merely saw it as work. So why is it when she said those words and looked at him with large frightened eyes he felt remorse?

He attempted to be logical about the whole thing. She was his sister's pet. Of course he wouldn't want to damage her and make his sister and niece unhappy. Plus the human hadn't been insubordinate as far as he knew and deserved no punishment. But… That also led him to wonder why exactly she'd been sleeping underneath him like a child slept with a toy. He'd been lying on her…. And when she awoke she didn't seem surprised by this which meant he'd done it before. He could see glimpses of it. Him pulling her onto the bed with him and using her as a pillow. Perhaps it was because she was so warm and soft? Or maybe because she was the only other being in the entire house.

Remarkably she seemed to have a positive attitude about the whole experience. She seemed to be simply shrugging it off like it was nothing and he doubted she would tell anyone. This would've been the perfect opportunity to escape if she'd wanted to. He, and most of the army, were too weak to do anything. No one else was here supervising her. And if she had run the remaining army was stretched far too thin to have worried about going after her in particular. But she hadn't.

She'd not only stayed but basically pampered him. Done nearly everything for him. He'd have to remember to give her a reward for such devoted service. Somehow though, in the depths of his mind, a little voice was telling him maybe she stayed not only because it was her duty. He tried to ignore the voice but it came screaming back to life later that night once she'd nodded off and was sleeping in a chair beside his bed. Even though she was in the same room as him he felt oddly enough lonely. Like suddenly the same bed he'd slept in for many years of his life had suddenly become too big for one ape.

New Faces and Allies

The rainy season sucks. I think I was putting it mildly. It rained seemingly nonstop. The apes weren't a big fan and most businesses and pretty much everything stood at a standstill. Those that couldn't afford humans to go out and run for them were basically shut up in their homes in the hopes of waiting it out. If it stopped raining for five seconds everyone would run out and get everything they could. But there were periods of time where it rained for a week straight.

But we weren't sticking around for the entire season. Some of the wealthier ape families had the comfort of what I considered 'summer homes' they could escape to this time of year. We did the same thing as when we went to visit Tomoko only we packed more stuff this time around. Uros didn't seem to be doing all that great either. He'd go into random coughing fits but waved us off. I had my doubts.

I was sort of glad though when we traversed into terrain where it wasn't raining. We crossed what must've been miles of fields and farmlands. It was weird… But the farther we went from the city the more I saw humans and apes working out in the fields together. I guess you could argue these apes were farmers and producing as much crop as possible made them more money. But the way the kids ran around… I wasn't so sure.

It took four days but we finally managed to reach the new destination. It was another forested area but the trees were far larger and farther apart. Like a red wood forest instead of a tropical one. Strange how this world's geography changed within such a short amount of area.

The house was nice; ok it was more like mini houses. These ones were essentially large tree houses where one family owned each tree. In the tree itself were multiple small houses connected by bridges. In order to get up to them there was a ridiculous set of stairs although there were also plenty of vines I'm sure the apes could use if they were in the mood.

It took a while but we finally managed to get all of the stuff and everyone up into the main house part. In it was the living room area, an entertaining area, and the kitchen. Bridges branched off to the smaller houses where the bedrooms and bathrooms were. I had to say it was impressive and had honestly never seen anything like it. It put the one me and Leo had constructed in our backyard to shame.

We were barely settled in when we got our first invitation. Turns out all the big shots migrated here this time of year and couldn't wait to get in good with the family. Though no one was exactly jumping for joy when we learned who was throwing the party. It was some senator chimp named Seneca. I guess he was really in good with Shiva. So I could see why no one was thrilled. But seeing as he was a senator and had to constantly work with Thade we couldn't just brush him off.

~*~

So the next night we were off to some meeting place. None of the houses alone were big enough to throw this sort of party but luckily for us there were special buildings on the

ground you could rent out. Joy. Everyone was wearing their best and Zena and I were brought along for the food. Lola said these places either had the best or worst food. Depending on that factor we'd either stick around or make an excuse to leave immediately. Especially considering Uros wasn't feeling well enough to join us.

I'd never seen so many uncomfortable looking apes in my life. All of them wore things they didn't look accustomed to wearing. Even Lola or one of us had to keep reminding Layla not to pull on her dress. Most of them had humans accompanying them as well but a few had monkey standing near or behind them. I think this wasn't so much a party as a gab fest.

I don't think they were even trying to keep their voices down as gossip flew everywhere. Oh this ape was pregnant, this one wasn't, this ape was courting that one but the father disapproved. The list went on and on. Reminded me of why I hated parties back on Earth. I could never stomach them.

I was actually thankful when this Seneca arrived. He was about Thade's height, a little shorter, and held himself with a certain air of confidence that was hard to ignore. "Welcome my esteemed guests," he gestured to all the apes present. "I see you are all enjoying the grand weather Endo has to offer," he stopped and kissed a female chimp's hand. She blushed and giggled with the rest of the females standing near her. "Though this lovely place pales in comparison to the beauty in this room." I wanted to gag but held myself in check. Thade didn't though as he let out an irritated huff. Lola lightly smacked him in the arm to shut him up before anyone else could hear.

"Ah hello General Thade, Lady Lola," he made his way over to us. "It has been far too long," he kissed Lola's hand as well.

"Senator Seneca," she kept her tone polite but I could detect a certain coldness behind it. Like she couldn't wait to get out of here too. "Thank you for inviting us to this lovely get together."

"You are most welcome my lady," he smiled at her. "And I see someone is growing to be as lovely as her mother." Layla hid behind me as if I could save her. I didn't blame her for not wanting to be put in the spotlight. "Why General Thade," he took on a certain smirk when he saw me. "I wasn't aware you held an affinity for humans. I thought you preferred running them down and killing them like the beasts they are." I'm not sure if that was supposed to be funny but a couple of apes chuckled nervously.

"Actually Senator she is mine," Lola spoke up. "Is there some sort of problem?" I could see the challenge in her eyes. She was just waiting for him to say the wrong thing.

"Why no," he countered. "I understand a kindhearted individual such as yourself taking pity on the lesser species." He leaned over and grabbed a piece of my hair. He held it so hard I actually had to move forward as he took a step back or have it ripped out. "At least yours is well behaved. I wonder…"

Thade cut him off as he grabbed onto the senator's arm. "Release her," I could hear Thade's voice taking on his snarling tone. It meant shit was about to go down soon. "Now."

The senator stood there a moment longer before he released me and his grin returned. "My my. I do apologize if I overstepped my bounds. I won't touch your property again. I do hope you have a pleasant evening General Thade, Lady Lola." They didn't reply but Lola nodded and Thade stood there with a glare on his face like he was ready to jump the senator any second. I had to give the asshole points. Usually when Thade gave anyone aside from Attar or Lola that look they ran away screaming or cowered. "Let the party begin!"

"We are leaving," Thade told us brushing past Lola as he headed for the door.

"Agreed," Lola didn't bother with etiquette this time as she motioned for us to follow her and Thade.

"Lea," Layla pulled on my arm. "Senator Seneca is a jerk…"

"Layla," Lola used her super mom hearing as she glanced back at her daughter.

"I'm afraid she's right," a new voice said and we looked over to see a rather moderately dressed orangutan in light orange clothes. "I've never enjoyed this sort of socializing myself."

"Senator Virgil," Lola smiled at him. "It has been too long." She actually leaned over and hugged him.

"It has. But I won't keep you. I'm trying to escape myself," he chuckled. "Perhaps we may converse at a later time."

"Of course, of course," she answered as we all saw Thade giving us the 'hurry up' look. "Do not be a stranger."

We said our quick goodbyes and beat it out of there. This had been one heck of a night. First this asshole senator and now this Virgil who I was oddly getting good vibes off of. I was thankful when we got the hell out of there and I nearly laughed when we got back to the house. Everyone went off to change into their comfortable clothes, Uros came out to sit with us in the living area, and everyone ended up munching on food while Thade and Lola informed their father of who'd been at the gathering and what had happened. Uros didn't blame them for leaving. "If someone did that back in my day," he stated. "We wacked them upside their head." Maybe it was the tension that had been building up we'd all been ignoring, or maybe what Uros said was really that funny. In any case we all ended up laughing at that, except for Layla who'd fallen asleep on her grandfather's lap. It didn't matter what we were at that moment. We all laughed the same.

~*~

This Virgil guy came around a few days later and I suppose Lola and Thade knew him from when they'd gone to school. He spoke a while with Thade and Uros before the older ape went off to go take a nap and Thade had work to do. He might've been on vacation but that didn't halt his duties. He was constantly getting letters and documents that needed reviewing or approved. He managed to work from his room seeing as he didn't have enough room for an office.

That left Zena and Layla going off to shop while I stayed behind with our guest and Lola. They talked about the normal things for a while, like how he liked what she'd done with the house and such. But then things took a drastic turn that nearly made me drop the bowl I'd been carrying. "So Lola would you feel like selling me your human?"

Lola was as much in shock as me. "But Virgil," she stated. "I thought you were opposed to human trafficking."

"Make no mistake I am. I fully intend to set every human I purchase free. So how about it?" He was so forward and friendly with the comment he could've easily been talking about buying flowers or something.

"I'm afraid not. You see Lea's more than just a servant. She's my friend and a member of this family. But I do value what she thinks and if she would agree to this I would not stop her." She motioned for me to come over and sit on the couch near her. "What do you think Lea?" she asked softly patting my hand. "Do you want to go along with Virgil's plan? I know him and he has always been true to his word. You could be free. Maybe you'd be able to find your brother out there."

I didn't hesitate as I gave an answer. "No thank you. I would never be able to find Leo on my own. But also I like you too Lola. You were the first being here that was nice to me. I owe you so much for everything you've done. Plus, I couldn't just leave you, Layla, Zena, and… Thade. I couldn't abandon you."

"If you're not going to take me up on the offer then there are a few other apes I would like you to meet. You don't have to worry; they oppose the laws as well. They're just not as open about it as me, well some of them anyway."

"Do you feel comfortable doing this Lea?" Lola asked me.

"If you are," I answered.

"Very well. I'll set up the meetings."

"How soon can we meet them Virgil?" Lola inquired.

"My dear," he patted her hand after he got up. "Never underestimate my connections. If you're ready it can be as soon as tomorrow."

Shocking

Virgil kept his word and the next day Lola and I were off to see a couple who I think were philosophers? I wasn't entirely sure what their titles were just that they were some sort of 'doctors' and had voiced their opinions on the human/ape situation numerous times. In public arenas. Virgil met us there and while their tree houses weren't as big or fancy as ours they were still nice.

"I'm coming, I'm coming," I heard a female voice state after we knocked. "Oh," a female chimp who was a couple years older than Lola answered. "Virgil, it's been too long," she embraced him. "And I see you've brought company. Come in, come in." We were ushered in and immediately offered drinks. "Would you like one dear?" she actually asked me. "Go on," she lightly urged. "I'm not going to bite you." I took one not to be rude and we all sat down.

"So where's Cornelius?" Virgil inquired as the female chimp flittered about the room fixing things and moving them about. It was like she had too much energy to sit down.

"He's off with our nephew getting some food but he'll be home shortly. I'm sorry," she finally stopped long enough to sit down with us. "How rude of me. I'm Zira and you are?"

"Zira," Virgil spoke up for us. "This is Lola and Lea. They're the ones I told you about."

"Of course I'm not blind," she lightly stated. "So nice to meet you. I don't run into other human sympathizers often. I have to say it's a nice change of pace. Though I hope you don't mind if I ask you something Lola."

"You may."

"I'm just a little surprised is all."

"My family and more importantly brother?" Lola asked without missing a beat. "I cannot say I blame you."

"I've attended some military conferences before," Zira stated. "I happened to hear him speak on a couple of matters. The human population being one. He is rather… Loud about his points."

"You should know Thade hasn't spoken at one of those in nearly a year," Lola replied. "Perhaps I'm being a little optimistic, he is my brother after all. But I'd like to think he's starting to understand humans are the same as us."

Zira didn't look convinced. "He is pretty nice," I spoke up. "Once you get to know him. He used to freak me out when I first met him. Now," I shrugged. "Well I work with him nearly every day."

Zira was really nice once you got passed all of her enthusiasm and energy. She reminded me of an older version of Lola. We ended up talking for quite a while, and I mentioned my

brother in case she ever came across him. That's when her husband and nephew came home.

"You didn't tell me we were having company dear," this Cornelius guy stated quickly kissing her on the cheek. He was slightly older than her but I could also tell he had a lot of energy as well. It was just a little more conserved than Zira's. One thing was for sure, they loved each other. I could tell just by the way they shared looks.

"Hello Senator Virgil," the nephew Galen stated. He looked like a younger version of Cornelius and I could definitely see the family resemblance. "Is this Lady Lola?"

"I see you still know you're public figures," Virgil stated shaking his hand. "And always so formal."

"You'd be surprised how far manners can get you in life," he replied. "And who is this?" he inquired looking at me.

"Hi," I smiled. "I'm Lea."

"She's the one Virgil told us about the other night," Zira partially explained putting things away.

"We can see that dear," Cornelius handed her a pear.

"I've never seen a human with two different colored eyes before," Galen stood in front of me. He wasn't as tall as Thade but he was still bigger than myself.

"It's rude to stare, Galen," Cornelius stated.

"He's alright," I said even though Galen realized his mistake and backed up a little. "You're not the first and I doubt you'll be the last."

Cornelius and Galen weren't as boisterous as Zira was when it came to their opinions in the public eye. Yes they held fast to their beliefs it was just that they didn't tend to yell them as much. I have to say it was a decent change of pace to be able to finally relax and be myself around some different faces. Galen was especially interesting to talk to. He went on and on about his theories and what changes could be made that would benefit both ape and mankind. How we could all live together in harmony if everyone got past their preconceived notions and prejudices. It was basically the same as his aunt and uncle's theory but he expanded on what a world would be like. Plus his energy was amazing.

"I'm afraid it's time to leave," Lola spoke up. "Father and Thade will worry if we do not return soon."

"I'll walk you home," Virgil offered.

"We understand," Cornelius stated walking us to the door.

"Please come again," Zira hugged us all. "It was wonderful to meet all of you."

"Perhaps we could get together some time and I could finish explaining my theories?" Galen asked me.

"I'd like that," I answered. "We should get together soon."

"I agree."

~*~

"I do believe Galen likes you," Lola lightly nudged me on the way home.

"He does not," I returned. "He's just nice like his family."

"I saw the way he looked at you."

"Come on Lola," I sighed. "Be serious." No ape had looked at me like that the entire time I was here. I didn't even get that sort of vibe from Thade when he was sick and lying on me.

"I am. You are beautiful Lea," she moved some hair out of my face.

"You mean for a human?"

"I mean you are gorgeous in the eyes of those worthy of you," her smile was genuine and I knew she meant it. How was I supposed to counter to that?

"I…"

"Do not doubt yourself," she patted my hand.

"I've never been the pretty one," I admitted. "I've been called 'cute' and 'average' but never beautiful or stunning. It's ok. I might not be the best looking woman ever but I'm smart and have a decent sense of humor."

"Not to mention the patience to deal with my brother," Lola took my arm in hers as we walked together. Virgil gave us some alone time as he walked a little further ahead. "Do you like Galen back?"

"No," I answered. "And it's not because he's an ape. That doesn't bother me at all." It honestly didn't. At this point I was just used to it and it's not like they could be considered 'normal' apes anymore. "He's open-minded and full of energy."

"Not your type I take it?"

"Unfortunately no."

"Don't worry," she told me. "You'll find your match. It just might take some time."

"Lola," I began. "I don't mean to bug you but what happened to Layla's father?" I didn't ask because I knew it couldn't be good. But all this time and I'd never asked. Now seemed like the perfect time.

"Ah," she kept on her smile. "Moros. You are not bothering me. My love holds nothing but good memories for me. He fell ill one day when Layla was three. He never recovered. But he held on for us. He was always so strong…" She stopped walking for a moment and I felt bad because I thought she'd start crying. Instead a look of peace came over her features. "One of the things I loved about him the most was that no matter his tough image he was so gentle with me and Layla. Like we were made of glass. You should've seen him when he came to ask father if he could marry me."

"Bet Thade was thrilled."

"You have no idea. I lost him a year later. But for those years I spent with him. They were some of the best of my life. And he gave me Layla so he is never truly gone. You will find someone like that for you Lea. Who will see you and treat you like a queen. You'll feel safe in their arms and never want to let go."

"Thank you for sharing that with me Lola." Her story was great and all but I had my doubts about me finding someone. I hoped but wasn't stupid. This was the real world. Not everyone got a 'happily-ever-after'. Let alone on a planet of the apes.

"You will see," she kept at it as we approached the house. "It simply seems impossible now because you are so young. Patience."

We told Virgil goodnight and found mostly everyone was asleep. "I wish you would return home sooner," I wasn't shocked to see Thade up reading what appeared to be reports. "It is not safe out there at night."

"You fret too much," Lola waved his concern off. "Senator Virgil even escorted us home. Now if you'll excuse me I'm off to bed. Lea you may decide what you want to do."

"Goodnight my Lady," I told her and we shared a wink as she was off. "Sir?"

"You do not have to help me," he stated before I could offer. "Go to sleep or something."

"Sir," I stood firm. I stood in front of him and glared through the report. "It is not healthy for you and I suggest you retire as well." Months ago I would've never said this. Now I knew he'd work himself into exhaustion and we did not need him getting sick again.

"I should punish you for insubordination," he let out a long sigh but his words held no threat. "Very well." He got up and put the report down. "I can tell you would stand there all night staring at me until I quit."

"Yes sir," I couldn't help but smile at him as I went to join Zena in the servant's quarters. "Goodnight."

"Yes yes," he waved me off as he went to his own room.

~*~

The next day Virgil had another meeting set up for us. But Lola was running a little, Layla and fresh oranges do not mix well, late and she let me go on ahead since I was out running

errands anyway. He already told Lola where we would be as he led me there. This time it wasn't a house but one of the meeting houses they had set up. Though this one was smaller and more out of the way. Not too many prying eyes would be around here. "I will warn you," he told me. "This may be a bit of a surprise."

"I don't think anything on this world can really shock me anymore," I countered. We went in and traveled to the back area where a little balcony was. I saw an eerily familiar figure standing there and looked to Virgil for confirmation. He nodded and ushered me forward.

"I did warn you."

"It has been a while old friend," the figure greeted Virgil first.

"Yes it has Seneca," Virgil told him.

She Knows

I couldn't help but stand there a moment. Seneca? No really, Senator Seneca? *You've got to be shitting me.*

"I understand this may not be easy to swallow," Seneca's whole demeanor seemed to have changed. Instead of pompous and arrogant he seemed humble and… Nice. "You have no reason to trust me. I've been far from a gentleape when it comes to you."

"Seneca has to keep up appearances in public," Virgil told me. "He is Shiva's second-in-command. Which makes him all the more valuable to our cause."

"I think I get it," I was still a little skeptical but logically it made sense. He'd not only know everything going on but maybe be able to stop or alter things for our benefit. "You really should try your hand at acting."

"You're not the first to suggest that," he smiled at me. "I think you'd get along with my brother."

"Too bad Fyn couldn't join us," Virgil stated.

"Someone has to keep Shiva busy while she's on her pilgrimage," he explained. "But I received news from him last night. We have more friends than we previously believed."

"Always good to hear," Virgil replied. "How rude of me. You two haven't been properly introduced yet. Lea this is Seneca."

"Pleasure to meet you my dear," this time he took my hand in his and patted it. "I do apologize for what I said and did at the party."

I couldn't help but smile at him. He seemed genuine and Virgil wouldn't lie. "No problem and it's nice meeting you too Senator." I couldn't help it as a small laugh escaped me.

They both looked confused at that. "Did I miss something?" Virgil inquired.

"Sorry. It's just that here I am. And I know all of these important public figures. Lucky me." They shared a look before a smile spread across Virgil's face. He couldn't help it as he began laughing as well. Seneca managed to remain a bit more composed but did smile as well. "In fact," I informed them once we calmed down. "There's someone you both may wish to meet. But I'll have to run it by Lola first. He is her father after all."

"Lord Uros?!"

"I see I'm late to this party," Lola stood in the doorway. "Senator Seneca I'm a little surprised you are here. Lea, what is this about my father?"

"There's something I need to tell you Lola but in private."

Once Seneca stopped his act he was a very agreeable ape. Lola dropped her dislike of him instantly once she saw the real him. Not that I blame her. We discussed when we could next meet and what exactly all of us could do for humans. Seneca kept track of Shiva and those like her, Virgil kept everyone in touch with one another, Lola could put out feelers and see if anyone else was like them. I could essentially be a spy and keep my ears and eyes open. No one would notice me walking between humans and apes.

~*~

That night though Lola learned the truth about me. She had a long talk with her father and I chimed in when appropriate. Lola didn't say anything for a time and asked to be alone. I thought maybe I'd made the wrong decision in not telling her originally. But Uros reassured me this would've been a lot to take in anyway. All we could do was wait and hope Lola came around.

She did the next day when she came over and gave me a hug. I was a little surprised. "I'm sorry," I told her. "I didn't know how to tell you."

"I understand. I cannot say I would've believed you if you alone had told me. I understand your need to keep this secret though it does explain a lot of things."

"Yeah but I lied."

"Water under the bridge," she smiled at me. "I appreciate the fact you trust me enough to share this information with me."

"Uros wants to tell Thade too. Though he thinks it best to leave that until his deathbed."

"I cannot blame father. Thade is many things. Understanding is not one of his virtues."

"Don't I know it. But I'm not sure if that's right either. Thade's not the most accepting ape but he doesn't need it dropped on him like that." Lola just gave me a small smile at that. "What?"

"Nothing Lea."

~*~

Most of our days in the treehouse consisted of spending time with our new associates and meetings. It was pleasant. Zira and Cornelius always wanted to ask me question seeing as I was more open and blunt with them than most humans were. Galen was nice to go on walks with. He always had a new theory and would go into depth with it for hours. Then he'd ask me what I thought and if I had any suggestions. Reminded me of when I was back on the Oberon. Layla often liked to tag along on these ventures with us, even if she didn't understand what we were talking about. Virgil would visit and sometimes stay with us for days before he disappeared to go see someone else. He always seemed to be on the move. Zena seemed to like him too. I couldn't tell if it was his personality or because he treated her like he did everyone else and she enjoyed that. Even Senator Seneca visited quite often. He often spoke with Uros a good bit or Lola although he did speak with me and Zena as often.

Took some time to convince Zena he was trying to trick us or something but eventually she melted.

In all the friendly chaos I sort of felt bad for Thade. I knew why he was out of the loop but… He often retreated to his office/bedroom area for nearly days at a time. Or he was out constantly giving orders and such. He wasn't enjoying any of this so called vacation. Plus he rarely spent time with any of the family, let alone guests.

I often tried to help hoping I could maybe aid him in getting it all done faster so that he could take a break. Sometimes he'd let me but other times he shooed me away to go help Lola or take care of Layla. When I did see him he looked more exhausted than normal and hunched over. Finally I had enough.

Lola and Zena were staying over with Zira and them. Layla was off on a sleepover. Uros was in his room fast asleep, he did that a lot these days. Which left me and Thade to our own devices. "Sir?" I tapped on his door.

"What is it?" he stated on the other side without opening the door.

"May I come in?"

I heard a loud sigh but could also tell he was relenting. "Very well." He had numerous papers on the desk in front of him. "Is something the matter?"

"No sir."

"Then why are you bothering me?"

"I was wondering if you needed help sir."

"No, now leave me. I will call you if I need you."

"Sir? Maybe you should stop for the night."

"Leave Lea," he ordered standing up and I knew he was serious. "Now." I didn't have any authority in this situation.

"Please don't work too hard sir," I said leaving. I knew what battles to pick.

~*~

The next day I was mostly on my own. No one had returned yet and Thade headed out to get some more work done. I was busy preparing something for Uros to eat when a knock came at the door. "Senator?" I asked answering. "What are you doing here?"

"Virgil wanted me to drop by," Seneca stated as I let him in. "He's afraid he'll be gone for a few weeks. Trouble's brewing in one of the neighboring sectors and he doesn't want it to escalate any further."

"Will he be alright?"

"Of course, Virgil can handle anything. Sorry am I interrupting something."

"No no," I went back to the food. "I'm just making Uros something. Are you hungry?"

"I'm fine thank you. I'll leave if you're busy."

"You can stay," I offered. Uros will be up shortly and I know he'll want to talk to you. "That is if you have the time." So Seneca hung around while I got some things done. Though I was having trouble with the pineapple like fruit. It was as hard as a brick and the knife slipped. "Ow," I didn't cut myself but it was close.

"Are you alright?" he came over and stood next to me. "May I demonstrate? I know these can be tricky."

"If you want." He let me hold the knife as he stood behind me to better guide my hands. He showed me the proper technique that might've been easier for me. "Thanks Seneca," I told him smiling. "You're a good friend."

"As are you." That was when the door came flying open and we suddenly weren't alone.

"I'm only staying for a moment Lea," we both froze as Thade stood there staring at us. He stopped as well when he saw I wasn't by myself. I had no clue what was going to happen or how I could explain this. I felt Seneca tense behind me and I wondered if he could come up with a good enough excuse.

"Sir…"

"General Thade."

"Senator," Thade noticeably bristled up and I knew this was bad. As in duck under the table bad. "What are you doing in my home?"

"Just came to see how you all were doing." I could tell Seneca was scrambling. Luckily he kept his voice even under pressure.

"What are you doing with Lea?" Thade's voice got a scary edge to it I'd only heard a few times.

"Why General I'm just…"

"Maybe you should leave Senator," I stated. The sooner he left the better. "Now."

"Yes, it appears I have overstayed my welcome. I don't know how you do it," Seneca patted my head. "Tame humans are so hard to come by."

"Stop touching her," Thade took a step forward.

"What's wrong General?" I wasn't sure what Seneca was thinking as he lightly pulled me into a partial embrace. "You know I was wondering. Would you be willing to sell her to me?"

"Leave," Thade snarled.

"Such a unique one at that," Seneca leaned on me. "So well behaved and such lovely features for a human…" Seneca didn't get to finish that statement as Thade came flying at him letting out a high pitched screech. Seneca pushed me out of the way and jumped so that he could avoid Thade. I didn't blame him. Thade yelled like he was on the warpath. "I'll just be leaving," Seneca made a bolt for the door. Thade was about to give chase when I latched onto his arm out of instinct. The more I could give Seneca a head start the better.

"Please sir," I started when he looked at me. He bared his teeth but then seemed to calm down once Seneca was out the door. That left me holding onto Thade's arm and him standing there breathing hard and lightly snarling under his breath.

A Good Day Gone Bad

I noticed I was still holding onto Thade's arm and he was staring straight ahead like he wasn't seeing anything. I quickly let go of him and took a step back. "Uh…" *What the hell do I say?* "I'm sorry sir," I scrambled.

"*You're* sorry?" he spoke and looked at me like he couldn't believe it. "You're the one who's sorry?" He grabbed me by the arms and looked me over like he was searching for something.

"Sir?"

"Did he hurt you?" Thade asked me and got right in my face. "Did he do something to you? Tell me!"

"N-no!" he was starting to freak me out. "The senator came here and then you walked in. Nothing else happened sir. I swear."

Thade sort of freaked me out when he pulled me really close to him and sniffed me. "His stench is all over you. Go wash yourself off. I'll handle things from here." I didn't argue as I went to quickly wash off. I'd never seen Thade that angry he actually attacked someone. Thrown a fit or thrown something yes but not so angry as to actually run after someone. And I also wanted to know why exactly Seneca had done all that. I could see him trying to cover his tracks but he didn't need to bait Thade the way he did.

It wasn't easy telling Lola what happened. Mainly because after the incident Thade wouldn't let me out of his sight for more than two seconds. At first I thought I was just imagining it. Then I realized it was true. Thade made me accompany him when he went out to work and I was shut up with him in his office most of the day. Unless Uros, Lola, or Layla needed me I was practically glued to his hip. Plus I heard Thade retell Lola what he saw happened, more like screamed it so loudly I think all our neighbors know about it too, and he announced no one was to see the Senator. He then went into detail of what he'd do to Seneca if he ever saw him again. Terrific.

Not to say I didn't like helping Thade with his work so he'd get it done faster. But I also felt like I was being smothered. I needed a little space. So I was thankful when Lola stated we were going to visit Zira and them for the day. Thade looked like he was about to argue with her but Lola gave him a look and he backed off. I hugged Lola once we were out of sight for that.

Cornelius sat with Zira and Lola as they discussed their latest improvements. Meanwhile Layla and I were going to accompany Galen to collect some of the berries that grew in the area. I guess they were the best on the continent or something. I wanted to leap for joy at being in the fresh air without having to nearly run to keep up with a pissed off chimp. Layla frolicked ahead of us as we walked at a normal pace along the path. I felt bad Uros and Zena were missing it because they stayed home.

"Lea?" Galen inquired. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine why?"

"Well you've just been smiling a lot more than usual."

"I'm just glad to be out of the house is all. Thanks for letting me and Layla come with you."

"Not a problem," he returned my smile.

"Young Miss please stay on the path!" I called out. "Your mother doesn't want you to ruin your new dress."

"I won't Lea!" Layla called back to me.

"You're rather good with her," Galen noted. "Have you taken care of children before?"

"No." Just your distant cousins. But it wasn't like I could say that out loud. "But Layla's really well behaved so it's more like I'm watching over a friend."

"Hm you have an interesting way of looking at things."

"Tell me about it."

~*~

An hour later we had two baskets full of what might've been weird blue berries. Though every now and then we'd nibble on them. Layla had blue stains on her dress from where she'd rubbed her hands on it. So much for that new dress staying clean. I'd just have to wash it well later.

"Is that basket too heavy for you?" Galen asked me as I readjusted it. "I could carry it for you."

"No thanks," I said. "I got it but thank you for offering. You're a real gentleape you know that?"

"You flatter me Lea."

~*~

Thade snarled and the foot solider ran off like the general was about to pounce on him. Most of his subordinates knew to avoid him when he was in this type of mood. But every once in a while one of them had to go up and report. He slowly made his way back toward his rainy season housing. The rest of the officers would probably get more done without him glaring over their shoulders anyway.

For the life of him he couldn't really understand why he was so angry. Then he nearly snarled thinking back to when he'd caught the senator in his house. He gritted his teeth when he remembered how the senator had been standing right behind Lea. How he'd patted her on the head and nearly embraced her. He had the nerve to ask if he would be willing to sell her.

She was his property! He nearly stopped at the thought. Hm. Well, as he told her she did live under the same house as he did. By extension that meant she technically was as much his as his sister's. Which meant it was his duty to protect her and keep her safe. Apparently that job wasn't going to be as easy as he once believed. He could see apes taunting her or threatening her… But something made his stomach turn when he thought of what the senator might have done to her if he hadn't arrived.

Would the senator have done anything? He'd heard stories. One tended to in his line of work. Of apes doing certain things… Inappropriate things to humans. Could the senator be one of those apes? Thade often wrote the stories off as nothing more than rumors and sick myths spread by bored apes. But what if they weren't all rumors after all?

He clenched his fist and this time didn't stop the growl coming out of him. If that was the case he'd have to keep a better eye on Lea. She was unique for a human. Those eyes of hers. He'd never seen anything like them. Not to mention she was so well behaved. One could easily take advantage of that.

He stopped when he heard a familiar laugh. He happened to glance over and saw his niece skipping along a neighboring path. He expected to see Lola and her new friends with her. He could never keep track of names. Instead he saw Lea. She was caring a basket full of berries. But then he noticed a younger male chimp walking along with her holding his own basket.

Even from where he stood he could tell they were conversing and whatever it was had Lea smiling like he hadn't seen in a while. This chimp smiled back at her and Thade noticed the way he held himself. As if he was listening to Lea's every word. He couldn't help but think how close they were walking was slightly strange. It was how friends… Very close friends might walk together.

Lea stopped and began laughing at whatever it was the chimp said. She then lightly taped the chimp on the arm. Thade had never seen her do something like that before. The gesture was so open. In return the chimp looked shocked for a moment before he brought his own hand up and taped her back. But the general saw how the chimp's hand seemed to linger.

Luckily their moment was interrupted as his niece came running back to them. She then grabbed Lea's free hand and pulled her along. Lea bolted to keep up with her and the chimp followed close behind. All Thade could do was narrow his eyes.

~*~

Today was a nice day. Galen was as enjoyable as always and the berries were pretty good. We brought some home with us after saying goodbye to Zira and them. Though I couldn't help but wonder about how Thade's day had gone. He was already home when we go there but locked himself in his office. From what Zena told me he was in a mood.

Great way to end a nice day. But I shrugged it off. I said goodnight to everyone as I tidied up a little before I would turn in myself. Plus I wanted to read a bit of one of the books Galen had recommended. I was not expecting to see Thade walk in wearing his usual night wear. A deep frown set on his face.

"Sir?" I asked putting the book down. "Can I get something for you?" He usually wasn't up this late.

He didn't answer me but sat down on the couch we had. "Sit," he told me patting the seat beside him. I wondered what this was about but sat near him. Though there had to be about a foot between us. "I heard my sister took you to visit some friends of hers today."

"Yes sir."

"Anyone in particular you like?"

His question caught me off guard. "What do you mean sir?"

"I happened to see you walking with a young chimp today," he looked at me and I couldn't help but feel goosebumps go up my arms. "You seemed… Friendly with him."

"I-I…"

"Lea," he said. "I want you to be careful."

"I'm sorry?"

"Not all chimps are like me and my sister. They are not honorable. You must take care in their company. Or they might… Take advantage of you." This was probably the last conversation I ever thought I'd be having with him. "I am not sure what your old owners were like. They must have treated you well. However, we will not always be around to protect you."

"Sir," I started. "Thank you for caring. But I can take care of myself. You don't have to worry."

"I am not worried," his voice took on an edge to it. "You are far too trusting Lea. All it takes is one opportunity. If I had not shown up the other day or if Layla had not been accompanying you today."

"With all due respect sir nothing would have happened." I had pretty good instincts and nothing was yelling at me with Seneca or Galen. They were nice, although Seneca could be rather stupid at times.

"How can you be so sure?" he countered and leaned toward me. I instinctively leaned back. "If you have forgotten we are apes. You are a human. I could have you killed if I wanted to."

"Sir…"

"Think about it. I am stronger than you," he grabbed onto my arm. Not enough to hurt but enough to make me feel uncomfortable. "I am faster than you. You could not outrun me or fight me off if I choose to go after you."

"Please let go of me sir."

"See? You have no power here. All your pleading or screaming would mean nothing. As my human you are at my mercy." He actually pounced on me and I was forced backwards and fell into the couch. He kept himself suspended over me. I couldn't read the look on his face and I wanted nothing more than to run screaming to Lola. But he used one hand to cover my mouth. I tried to get him off but it was like trying to move a brick house. "What if I were someone else? They could kill you or do whatever they wanted with you. You wouldn't even be able to make a sound."

"Thade," a stern voice started and we glanced over to see Uros standing in the doorway. "Get off of Lea." Thade leaned up enough and let go of me so I could slip out from under him. I ran over and stood behind Uros without thinking. "Go to bed Lea. I have to have a talk with my son." I looked between him and Thade one more time before I ran off to bed. I couldn't stop shaking and I doubted I was going to get much sleep that night.

An Interesting Night

I had no clue what it was Uros exactly said to Thade and honestly I didn't want to know. Yeah I could understand what Thade was getting across with his little demonstration. I'd worked with regular chimps enough to know they were the ones always in control not the other way around. But it still shook me up a little. Thankfully he gave me space after that and Uros informed me Thade would never do something like that again.

I tried to put it behind me but I think Lola and everyone else could pick up on my vibes. I'm not sure what they thought about it but I'm guessing they all knew it involved Thade some way or the other. Lola though didn't push it and I think she kept the others off my back. I'm not sure why but Seneca seemed to blame himself and apologized to me for taunting Thade that one time. Maybe he thought it led up to what had occurred but I was pretty sure there was more to it than that.

The thing that got me though was why Thade seemed so upset over it all. Yeah I was actually more concerned for him than I was for myself. I wanted to face palm at that and briefly wondered what was wrong with me. Leo always said I had a big heart. But why exactly was Thade so concerned with me spending time around other apes? He never complained when we were back home and I hung out with Ari or Uros. Hm… No he couldn't be jealous? Could he? He just didn't want me getting hurt and knowing my spectacular track record I could see why. Still, he didn't have to be that forward about it.

Days passed and I swear you could cut the tension with a knife. So we all basically jumped at the chance when we were invited to another party. This time our entire little group would be there. Even Uros was coming though I sort of wondered why seeing as he hated these things as much as Thade did. But he put on an elegant black and gold robe while everyone else got ready for the part. Zena and I were going to help Uros and watch out for Layla but I think Lola understood we needed a break from everything too.

The party itself wasn't as extravagant as the one Seneca threw but there was enough apes there to make a statement. Virgil, Zira, Cornelius, and Galen all greeted us when we arrived. I saw Seneca off somewhere in the crowd but he wisely stayed away from us. The only one not seeming to enjoy himself was Thade because he looked as stiff as ever and it was like his armor was bothering him, not like he wore anything else.

"I don't like these," Layla informed me picking up a fruit off the large concession table.

"Then don't eat it young Miss," I told her gently putting it back. Zena helped Uros set down in a nearby chair and I could tell he was drained from the entire experience already. I thought maybe I should offer to take him home early but I think he would've waved me off.

"This is rather boring," Zira stated as we all stood together watching various apes dance.

"Now dear," her husband tried.

"I'm simply saying. You and I have danced at these things far too many times," she stated. "It's always the same thing." I saw Thade standing a good distance away as other apes attempted to talk to him. From the look on his face he was tolerating them at best.

"Lea?" Galen came over in his nice green robes. "May I have this dance?"

I sort of stood there like a rock a moment while I collected my thoughts. "Galen… You don't want to dance with me. It'll probably cause trouble for you." I hadn't seen anyone else dance with a human. Who knows what rumors they'd say about him or something. "Plus I can't dance anyway."

"Go on Lea," Zira actually encouraged us. "It's not hard. Galen will lead."

"B-but."

"No buts," she told me gently pushing me along. "This party needs some fresh life in it. Now have fun."

And just like that I was pushed out onto the dance floor with the young chimp. "Now put your hand in mine," he gently told me. "And place the other on my shoulder." He did the same with me and he slowly led me through the moves. Some apes stopped dancing around us to stare and I think at this point everyone was like, 'What the hell?'

"You sure about this?" I whispered.

"You are a lovely dancer," he replied with a smile on his face. Soon though the dance was over and by that time we had the whole rooms' attention. I didn't know what to do and was about basically run of the dance floor when I was stopped.

"May I have the next one?" Zira asked. "It's time to mix things up a little don't you think?"

One by one I danced with most of our group. Zira, Cornelius, Virgil, and even Layla asked if she could dance with me though she had to stand on my feet as I moved around. It was different and for the first few minutes every ape in the place looked at all of us like we were nuts. Not to mention any of the human servants that had come along that night. But by the time I was dancing with Layla a funny thing had happened. I saw more than one ape walk over to their servants and I'm not so sure asked as made them dance as well. "This night just got more interesting," I noted.

~*~

Lola stood off to the side and couldn't help but smile at the sight before her. At first she thought about stepping in on Lea's behalf because she looked so uncomfortable but soon her friend was smiling and she didn't want to end that. Her daughter seemed to be enjoying herself as well as she took her turn dancing with Lea. Lola also noted how other apes seemed to follow her friends' led and were know attempting at dancing with their own servants. It was clumsy and both sides looked nearly terrified of the other but it was amusing all the same. It was a start. Also everyone was so preoccupied with their own partners no one really

took notice of how Virgil was now dancing with Zena. She could tell her old friend was enjoying herself as her tail swished back and forth happily.

"This is certainly the most entertaining party I've been too," Uros noted as she sat next to him.

"I have to agree father."

"What is this?" Thade approached them and she could tell he was thrown by what exactly he was seeing.

"It's just a little fun brother," she told him. "Relax and enjoy yourself." She noticed how Seneca mostly stayed off to himself during all this. But they shared a glance and she winked at him after he cast a glance Lea's way. "Jealous?" Lola ventured.

"Of what?" he bristled.

"If you want your turn all you have to do is ask." Thade didn't say anything but let out a low growl. "Though it looks to me like you may be a bit late."

"What do you mean?" he followed her gaze and saw Senator Seneca slowly making his way around the dance floor. It didn't take him long to figure out his destination was Lea as the song was finishing. "How dare he…"

"Well?" their father spoke up. "Don't just stand here. Do something about it Thade."

Lola knew her brother really didn't need the prompting as he went on a course to intercept the Senator. "Thank you for helping Father," she told him.

"Sometimes I wonder Lola," he patted her hand. "I'm glad you turned out more like your mother than myself."

"Don't blame yourself. Thade may be thick headed but he's coming around. I'm just thankful Lea's as understanding as she is."

"You know Lola. I can't help… Never mind."

"What is it?" she lightly inquired.

"Maybe it's my old age. But as I gaze out I can't help but think Lea is a lot like your mother was. Caring, considerate, very forgiving off fools."

"And Thade is much like you before you met mother," Lola finished it for him. "I was thinking the same thing." They sat there and both shared a knowing smile.

~*~

"Now go back to your mom," I told Layla as Lola motioned for her daughter to come over.

"Ok, I'll save you a tart Lea," she told me running off.

"You do look enchanting this evening," I looked behind me to see Seneca standing there. That mask of arrogance all over him.

"Senator," I noted trying to not laugh at his act.

"May I…"

"No you may not," a voice interrupted us and Thade came in between me and him. Thade gave him a warning snarl and I nodded for Seneca to back off on this one. "Come with me," Thade grabbed my hand and I followed after him. All those in our group stopped what they were doing and gave me nervous glances but I just smiled and gave them a reassuring wave with my free hand. I wasn't getting a bad vibe off of the general and I'd already pushed the incident into the back of my mind.

He led me outside and we stood on one of the balconies away from the party crowd. Once we were out of range of prying eyes I saw him noticeably slump a bit in his shoulders and he let out a long sigh. He suddenly looked at lot older. "Sir?" I asked. "Are you alright?"

"Am I alright?" he repeated the question and I noticed he still hadn't let go of my hand. "How can you be the one asking me that after…"

"It's alright sir," I lightly told him. It was clear he was beating himself up about scaring me. "You didn't hurt me the other night and you did make a good point. It's just… I've been around apes my whole life and I know how to handle myself. But if something does happen I'll scream for you or the Mistress and take care of myself until you get there."

~*~

In the span of a few moments she'd completely turned the entire situation around. Thade had expected her to fear or hate him. He wouldn't have blamed her after putting her in such a vulnerable position. But instead she dismissed the entire ordeal and was more concerned about how he felt than what he'd done. She was smiling at him like nothing had happened. He just couldn't get around how he kept underestimating this little human.

It was then he noted he still held one of her hands in his own. Though she didn't seem uncomfortable or disgusted about it. It was then he really took the time to look at it. Yes, he'd seen numerous humans before and she'd been around for a while but this was somehow…. Different.

He gently turned her hand over in his own. Of course hers was bound to be different. There was no hair and her skin was far softer than any female apes. But what struck him the most was how small it was. It fit nicely in his own and yet it didn't waver or shiver. It was as if she was entirely comfortable with the situation. That was when he honestly noticed how small she was in general.

Humans, especially that males, were often taller than chimps. It was just something that happened. Females were usually his height or a bit shorter. But Lea was nearly a head shorter than himself. She was small by human standards and ape standards as well seeing as Lola

was bigger than her. Even Zena was. But Lola had informed him Lea was an adult. Which meant she wouldn't be growing any more. She was stuck at that height.

Like he thought she'd be no match for an ape. If he wanted to he could simply throw her over his shoulder and run off with her. Yet she stood in front of him with complete confidence. Her two eyes boring into him. Like she could see everything about him and still smiled back at what she saw. Even for someone… In her position she still managed to look one the bright side of things and always had a smile for him and everyone else.

~*~

He stood there for a time silently and I could tell he was mulling things over. But I couldn't tell what on Earth he could be thinking holding my hand like he was and looking over it. "Sir?" He just kept looking at my hand silently. I thought maybe he didn't hear me or perhaps he just wasn't going to answer.

"I…" he began but trailed off. "I apologize the for the other night."

"Not needed sir," I used my other hand to gently put it on top of his. I'm not sure how long we stayed there for. But we just stood out in the night air. Noises from the party could be heard off in the distance. Thade didn't tell me to let go of him and he didn't move away. We simply stayed there. I found myself oddly enough enjoying it. But the moment couldn't last forever. Eventually Layla came and jumped on me, telling us it was time to go.

We didn't really speak on the way home or when we got there. But later that night I stayed up a little to read. Thade passed by before heading off to his own room. "Just promise me something," he stated. "Be more careful in the future."

"Of course," I smiled at him. Thade nodded before retiring for the night. I noticed he didn't stop or mention the fact I didn't address him as 'sir' at the end of my sentence. This was an interesting night indeed.

An Understanding

Thade and I had a sort of understanding after that. He wasn't always pressuring me or Lola for me to accompany him to his work. He didn't keep an eye on me all of the time. I don't know… It was just like we understood each other.

Though I found myself going with him more often under my own pretenses. Truth be told I enjoyed his company. His grumbling and occasional snarl actually were sort of funny to watch. That could've been because they were never directed toward me. Thade was smart, interesting, and genuinely likeable. Too bad he frowned so often.

"Lea?" he inquired standing near the door. I looked up and could tell he was heading out to meet up with some apes for work. I could say no. I felt he wouldn't press me or Lola about it. I glanced over at Lola to see if she needed any help.

"I've got this," she smiled at me looking over at her napping daughter.

"Ok, coming," I followed after Thade.

Sure enough we mostly walked around and Thade had a few meetings he attended. They mostly involved him telling some of his subordinates what he needed them to do and what reports he expected to have. No problems. Until we met with this unsightly older orangutan named Cluro. He was in the business of trading humans, so I wasn't too keen on liking him from the start. Not to mention he smelled horrible and looked like he hadn't bathed in three weeks. I fought to keep my face neutral and served him and Thade some refreshments in the meeting room before I took my seat off to the side. I didn't like how he kept looking at me. Neither did Thade by how he lightly snarled and turned the orangutan's attention back to him. "Is there anything else you wished to discuss?" Thade inquired. Usually once the meeting was over apes would get up and leave on their own in a timely manner. Not this guy.

"I was just wondering General, ever think of breeding your human?"

WHAT?! I clenched my fists but sat still. Thade bristled a little. "Excuse me?"

"I noticed she's in heat," Cluro stated. Yeah I was on my period. I'd learned to live with it and the fact everyone could smell it. Apes had better senses than we did. But everyone was considerate enough to not mention it or treat me differently. "From the look of it she's young. Adult but young. Prime breeding years. She gets much older and it'll be difficult for her to have any kids. With those eyes of hers. She'd fetch a fair price let alone if she had any children with that trait. I could offer my own services. I have a human male appropriate for the job. I'd be reasonable about it. You keep half the profits from her first or we could get lucky and she have twins. If you want to keep any of them I understand and am sure we can come to an agreement."

I looked to Thade. Something like this had honestly never crossed my mind. I felt horrible for all those out there in my position. We were little more than animals in the eyes of apes like him. It made me sick. But suddenly I didn't feel any apprehension when I noticed how Thade

was sitting. He was lightly shaking and I could nearly feel his uncontrolled rage. "I'm not interested" he snarled. "Our business is done here."

"Come now General a beauty like that won't happen again. And if you don't breed her properly another male will just jump on her if you don't get her fixed. Even then they might. I've seen it a hundred…"

"Leave," Thade growled at him. "I said no and will not change my mind."

"B-but sir…" Thade answered with a screech that had the old perv running out of the room. Some chimps who'd been passing the door in the hallway briefly looked in at us before they bolted down the hallway. Thade got up and slammed the door shut before he glared around the room. He didn't focus on one particular thing or place but stalked around like he was in a cage. He actually threw a small fit, flipped over a table, and ran up and did a flip off the wall. "Who does he think he is?!"

I just sat there watching his temper fizzle out. Took longer than I thought it would. "Sir?" I eventually got up and righted one of the chairs he'd knocked over.

"We are done for the day," he informed me. "We are going home. Now."

"Yes," I nodded and followed after him.

~*~

Things were a little awkward when I explained it to Lola and the rest of our little group the next day. After Thade had yelled his own account at her the night previous. "I'll ripe his balls off myself!" Zira was outraged.

"How atrocious," Cornelius didn't try to contain Zira this time.

"I hope you don't let this sour you on orangutans," Virgil told me. "That ape represents the worst of us."

I assured him it didn't. Lola didn't say anything but I actually saw the cup in her hand slightly shaking and it oddly reminded me of Thade. The unhappy look on her face didn't contradict me. Zena had a disgusted look on her face, though I noticed she still hung around Virgil even more. Galen was so outraged he charged out of the room. I think he also felt somewhat embarrassed. The first time I'd seen him while I was having my monthly he looked everywhere but my face and blushed. It wasn't because he was disgusted but he didn't want me to feel uncomfortable. He didn't want to disrupt my modesty or something along those lines as Zira told me. Poor guy he was a real sweetheart.

Though they all agreed with how Thade handled the situation. Odd seeing as they were just as likely as to write Thade off. They actually nodded and I think Zira might have done something along the lines of his tantrum when I recounted that part. I lightly smiled and felt some sort of pride well up in my chest at that.

~*~

Lola looked to her brother the next night as they were the only two still awake. She couldn't help but smile at him from her book. "Lola?" he finally spoke up.

"Yes?" He didn't speak for a short while and she put her book down. He looked deep in thought about something. "What's on your mind?"

"Do you think Lea would like a mate?"

"Where did this come from? Please tell me you're not considering that trader's…"

"NO!" he sounded outraged. "It is just… She is lonely isn't she? Humans are social like use. What if she one day wants a mate? Or children?"

"Hm," Lola thought a moment. "You may be right. But she has not said anything about that to me. Nor do I think she's lonely brother. She has us."

"I meant…"

"You know what I meant Thade." She got up and patted his knee as she walked past him. "Dear brother. You're smart yet incredibly stupid."

"What do you mean?" Lola only continued to smile and lightly chuckled to herself as she walked down the hall.

~*~

It was rare for me to get away from everyone. But I was a little thankful for the breathing room. Gave me some time to think. But I was no closer to finding my brother or any answers. I looked up at the sky and briefly wondered how long I'd been on this strange planet exactly. I sort of lost count of the days. One event blurring into another.

"Hey!" I heard a voice call out behind me. I looked around to see a guy about my age with short brown hair and blue eyes coming my way.

"Can I help you?" I'd talked to some people before but they were rarely the ones to initiate the conversation.

"I'm hoping so," he smirked at me. "I'm just going to say you're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen."

"Thank you?" I was skeptical and didn't like how close this guy was getting to me. "I gotta go."

"Wait," he tried to grab my arm but I shrugged him off.

"I don't even know you."

"The name's Nu nice to meet you."

"I'm going now."

"Alright," he sighed. "I was trying to be nice. My owner Cluro sent me. Said we should have some fun. You and me. So, how about it?"

"WHAT?! Ew no. No way in hell. Bye."

"Come on," he stepped in front of me. He was easily a foot and half taller than myself. "It doesn't have to be bad. I really know how to please. Besides when was the last time you did something without your owners knowing. Huh? I promise they won't find out."

"Until I'm pregnant right? I get your game pal and Cluro's. You both can go f*** yourselves."

"Come on," he tried to grab me again. "I'll make it fast. I promise. But I can't go back without doing this."

"I'll give you five seconds to get out of my face," I snarled at him. Turns out I didn't have to lift a finger. Cause two seconds later a figure came down from above and smashed into the guy. Nu ate it face first into the dirt and was then was knocked severely in the back of his head. From the look of it I doubted he was going to get up in the next two days.

I looked up to see who'd done the dead I was beaten to. In front of me was a baboon who was shorter than even myself. He had light silver hair and startling matching eyes. I noticed he was wearing a black outfit that reminded of me Tomoko's. "I apologize Master," he lightly bowed to me. "But I did not wish for you to soil yourself with this filth."

"Thank you," I bowed back out of respect. "Are you one of Tomoko's students?"

"Yes Sensei."

"You don't have to do that. Just call me Lea."

"But Master I do not wish to disrespect you."

"You won't. I just never cared for titles is all. Even in the arts. Though I do prefer Sensei seeing as it moreover means teacher."

"Then Sensei it is."

"Have you been following me all this time?"

"Yes and no. I cannot watch you all hours of the day and night." He looked nearly ashamed at that. "But I do what I can. I'm to keep out of sight and mind until you need me. It… Has not been easy. I am at your call Sensei."

I'd nearly forgot the promise Tomoko made me. I felt bad at that. This guy had been being my silent bodyguard all this time? Not an easy job. I wondered how many times he wanted to step in and held himself back. "I apologize," I stated catching him off guard. "You don't have the easiest job in the world and I haven't helped at all. I thank you for not coming to my rescue until now. I'll try to be more careful in the future. Might I know your name?"

"Tomo," he answered. "And I am here to follow you Sensei. Not hinder you. Master Tomoko instructed me that you have many missions to complete of your own. My mission is to help you complete yours."

"Tomo," I wondered if he's related to Tomoko or if that was a coincidence. "I understand Master Tomoko placed this upon you. But you don't have to do this. You can go home. I don't need protecting. I'll handle your Sensei if he says anything about it."

"You don't understand Sensei. My Master did not force me to do this. He asked and I volunteered. I know where you come from and while I cannot comprehend everything about you, your previous world, or what you will do here I know this. My instincts told me I need to be here. I am fully aware you do not need my protection. I've seen you face down plenty of angered apes and not receive a scratch."

"Thank you Tomo," I said after a beat. "But you don't always have to stay in the shadows. Lola knows what's going on. If I'm alone or if it's just the two of us, hell I'm sure even Virgil or Zira and Cornelius. Heck anyone of my friends would keep quiet about this. Don't be afraid to say hi. I know it might go against your code to keep out of sight but still. It'll make me feel a little better you're not stuck outside playing stalker. Also," I looked down to the still unconscious man. "Thanks again. That was priceless."

"Thank you Sensei." I could see him trying to hide his own smirk.

Certain Events

Lola was the best person to introduce Tomo too first. She was as kind and courteous as ever. Plus she did know my secret. Everyone else was another matter. They wanted to know why exactly he was guarding me to begin with and all of that. He made the mistake of surprising Zena so bad she screamed and threw a bowl at him. Good thing he has fast hands. Luckily Tomo and Lola were able to fabricate a broad answer that I was one of the few humans that knew the ancient ways and that Tomoko wanted to make sure I was alright. I could see they didn't exactly buy the entire story but they didn't press it. Tomo seemed fine around Lola, and Zena when she wasn't throwing something at him and screaming he shouldn't sneak up on people. But he didn't show up a lot around anyone else. Except Uros but I could see why.

Virgil and Seneca tried to ask him everything they could. Tomo was clever and avoided them altogether after their initial meetings. I found myself wondering what exactly Nu said to Cluro when he woke up. I doubted he was going to say he was knocked unconscious by someone he never even saw. But Cluro tried playing his hand about a week later.

"Lady Lola," he approached us while we were out shopping. "You get more beautiful with each passing day."

"Cluro," she cut right to the point. I saw Nu standing a few feet behind him sporting a black eye. I fought the urge to smirk. "You're not here to socialize are you? Well I'm sorry to inform you but your human did not rape mine. Now if you would kindly leave my sight before I have my brother come here I would appreciate it."

He looked shocked and Nu appeared to be nearly shitting his pants. "I'm not sure what you mean my Lady. Humans procreate all the time. You can't take your eyes off them for a moment. Are you sure your human's not pregnant?"

"Cluro," she took a step closer to him. "Leave before I take matters into my own hands. And if you ever try another stunt like that I will hunt you down myself and figure out how to shove your balls down your throat." The glare she gave him could've scared Thade. A second later Cluro made a hasty retreat and I could hear him yelling at Nu as they disappeared. We wisely hadn't told Thade about the incident but we didn't need to.

Once we were by ourselves we placed our hands on each other's shoulders and laughed all the way back to the house.

~*~

A few things happened in rather rapid succession after that. The first one occurring while I was accompanying Virgil to the market one day and we were heading back to the house. He stopped and pointed out an older looking orangutan on the other side of the market. He wore luscious gold and orange robes and carried himself like he was entitled to something. Other apes flocked around him. It was almost like how Lola and Thade got attention.

"That's Senator Zaius," Virgil told me. "I heard rumors he'd be coming here. He's one of the most influential senators and a personal friend to Shiva." I looked at the ape and felt something churn in my stomach. I hadn't felt like that in a long time. My instincts told me he was bad news. I didn't even get this feeling around Shiva or Cluro but it was screaming with this guy. "Come along Lea," he gently pushed me to get me moving again. "Trust me when I say this is one ape you do not wish to meet."

"I agree," I stated as we went on our way.

Turns out we couldn't avoid Zaius that easily seeing as he came to visit a few times. When that happened Zena would wisely tuck me away in another part of the house or Lola would send me on some errand. I guess this Zaius guy really hated humans and thought all of us should either be slaves or exterminated. I could see how he got under everyone's nerves. Lola seemed dour when he'd leave, Zena kept her own head down more, and Thade… Well honestly Thade didn't act very different but always seemed in a bad mood when the Senator left. The only ones he didn't seem to have an effect on were Virgil, Seneca, and Zira. Of course Seneca had to play nice with him to keep his cover but appeared to shrug off whatever the orangutan said. Meanwhile Virgil and Zira seemed up to the challenge of not only meeting this guy head on but contradicting almost every point he made.

I didn't know what to think about all of it. Though Tomo actually made an appearance one night and told me to watch out for the ape. Zaius would kill me so much as look at me. And Tomo had overheard him trying to talk Thade and Lola into doing various things once he learned I existed. First he said I should be killed or severely punished for insubordination, then that I should be fixed to help reduce the population, then he actually offered to take me out of their hands. But that was only after he even saw me.

Once that occurred he was insist as hell and offered to pay them absurd amounts of money. Something about my eyes he told them when they asked. But they never agreed to anything he stated and said we were all fine. I breathed a sigh of relief. I also guess, as Uros later informed me, his family and Zaius' had a long history together that might've went all the way back to Semos himself. Though the aging chimp wasn't entirely sure on that. I felt horrible for him because he seemed to be getting worse every day.

Eventually though Zaius backed off and went about other business but I couldn't help but get a feeling of dread. Something was up with that ape. Something horrible.

~*~

The next thing that happened was on one of the days I accompanied Thade on his usual rounds. I'd seen some of his work with dealing with humans a few times before. So I wasn't overtly surprised when he was presented with a group of dirty looking men wearing animal skins. A subordinate informed him how they'd been captured attempting to steal another chimp's servant.

"Put them in the cages," Thade said. "We'll sell them to a trader and they'll be out of our hair."

It should've been over at that. I felt bad for these guys but what could I do in that situation? I couldn't advocate for them. By the looks in their eyes they'd kill the first ape they could. And

since I was following Thade it wasn't like I could sneak back and set them free. Though I did think about it.

We were working in his temporary office when one of the privates came rushing in. "Sir! The humans have escaped!"

"What?" Thade growled. "How?"

"We're not sure sir," the gorilla went on. "We think another human must've been involved. The cage was opened from the outside."

"Very well, round up ten men and search for them. Alert everyone you can. We can't have those feral humans reaching the city."

"Yes, sir!"

"Lea," he turned to me. "Come with me. It wouldn't be safe for you here by yourself."

"Yes, sir." I was sort of thankful those guys had gotten away but hoped they were smart enough just to leave. And I didn't know why Thade seemed so on edge. He left me alone in his office all the time. In retrospect it was probably the most well-guarded and safest place in the entire city. But when he looked at me I didn't argue. I saw something in his eyes. Was it fear? Was he honestly worried those men would come and try to take me with them or something? I think by this point he trusted me enough not to run.

He hopped on his horse to join the search party and offered me his hand. I looked at it a moment before he stated, "It will be faster this way." So I took it and he pulled me up to sit behind him. It was weird. Mainly because I'd never ridden a horse before and also because I basically had to hug him to keep myself from falling off. But he didn't say anything and neither did anyone else as we went under way.

~*~

Thade let out a sigh at the situation. This was exactly what he didn't need. Feral humans running around doing Semos knew what. Probably attempting to create chaos or steal other humans to take with them. He briefly glanced back at Lea as she held onto him. By the look on her face he could tell this was her first ride. Not surprising seeing as only apes were allowed on horses unless their owners gave permission.

But to him it was a little odd. Lea, even though she was human, seemed well rounded in all other aspects. She could read and write and was intelligent enough to be able to formulate plans and keep up in a conversation with an ape. Yet she'd never been on a horse? Well it wasn't like he could leave her alone. He didn't expect her to run but the opposite. What if those human males found her while he was gone? There were three, possibly more now, of them and they were easily all a foot taller than her. She'd told him previously she could take care of herself but he wasn't taking any chances. Not with her.

It took them three hours of searching before they caught a break. The humans hadn't gone far from the forested area near the military compound. But Thade couldn't help but narrow his

eyes. These humans were clever enough to escape but if that was the case why stick around and risk getting caught again? They hadn't headed in the direction of the city and there were not many houses out here that had human slaves they could attempt to steal.

He got his answer shortly after they followed the tracks into a dried out raven. The humans attempted to ambush them. A net captured a few of his soldiers and a couple others were knocked off their horses in surprise. But he could instantly tell these humans were amateur fighters at best and their plan was destined to fail. He jumped right off his horse and tackled one to the ground violently before his men followed suit. His seven to their ten might as well have been a hundred to one. The humans had surprise but that was it. They had no style or any sort of training in coordinating their movements. And from the look on their faces they didn't have any sort of backup plan other than attempting to stab them.

One of his men was cut in his shoulder but that was the extent of the ape's injuries. The humans had fared far worse. One's noise looked broken, another was beaten unconscious, and one's leg looked horribly sprained. The list went on and on but none of them were beyond healing and he didn't order them killed. Instead he ordered them to be returned to the cages and guarded this time until a trader could be brought in. He couldn't help but smirk at the looks on their faces. It was their own fault for not escaping when they had the chance.

"Sir?" Lea spoke up and he'd nearly forgotten her in the entire ordeal. "Are you alright?" she asked holding onto the horse and walking over to where he was.

"I'm fine," his smirk softened into that of a smile as he took in her expression. She seemed to be ignoring her fellow humans all together and focused only on him. Something in his chest swelled at that. He took the reins from her and began to walk away. "Let us return home. My work here is done."

"I will not be made a slave!" one of the men shouted before he managed to wriggle free of his binds. In two seconds he managed to pull a knife out of his boot and came running right at the General. Thade barely had enough time to turn around…

~*~

"No!" I shouted and jumped in between the crazy guy and Thade. I acted on instinct and threw my entire bodyweight into it as I elbowed him in the face. I made sure my one hand had ahold of his hand welding the weapon and I used the other to punch him in the gut. Before the man knew it I managed to flip him over my shoulder and his face met with the dirt. I twisted his arm, not hard enough to break it, but enough so that he'd release the weapon. It fell uselessly to the ground. It was only then as my adrenaline came down I realized what I'd just done.

"Traitor," the guy growled at me.

"Idiot," I replied.

~*~

Thade could only stand there a moment after what had happened. He hadn't expected that man to get away and come after him. Let alone Lea to come between them and save him. Yes he probably could've taken the man but not quick enough before he the human got a shot in on him. But Lea had acted on her own. She not only stopped the man but now had him face down in the dirt. If Thade didn't know any better it was like she'd been trained in fighting. But she didn't bare any marks of those humans stuck in illegal fights. Yet she'd taken on a man twice her size and hadn't gained a scratch.

"Take care of the human!" Thade barked at two of his subordinates just standing there in awe like he'd been. They stepped in and grabbed ahold of him while Lea stepped to the side. "Are you unharmed?" he asked her looking her over as if he'd missed something.

"I'm fine sir," she looked at him and he saw a certain amount of uncertainty there. What did she have to be so worried about? How exactly did she know how to fight like that? He had a feeling it had something to do with her past.

Make a Wish

I waved everyone off as they went out for the night. I suppose this was a very important night. "Lover's Night" it was nicknamed. I guess the fact comets were supposed to appear tonight was a contributing factor. Tonight people often went out together if they were either in a relationship or perhaps wanted to be in one. Although like Valentine's Day back home there were a few exceptions. Like if someone didn't have a significant other to celebrate with them friends or families could simply go out together. It sounded nice to me. I smiled as everyone else seemed to have important plans for the evening.

Seneca had asked Lola out. I wondered when he was going to. Lola played it off and said they were simply friends going to have a chat. Uh huh. Virgil decided to make his move as well. I'd never seen Zena so nervous. Lola even went out a bought her a nice new dress for the occasion. I heard Zira and Cornelius were called away on some sort of emergency and Galen went with them. No one was entirely sure when they'd be back.

"Bye Lea!" Layla waved at me. She held Uros' hand in one of her own. I smiled and thought it was adorable how Uros had stated he was going to be spending the night with the most beautiful chimp in the world.

"Bye, young Miss," I waved back at her. Uros only smiled back at me as he slowly made his way along. He wasn't doing well lately and I couldn't help but wonder in the far reaches of my mind if Uros time was almost up. I'd seen that same look in his glossy appearing eyes before with some older chimps. Maybe that was why he was trying to spend as much time with Layla and the others as possible.

I went back inside and looked around but there wasn't anything that needed done. So I slowly went down the hallway and knocked on Thade's door. From what Lola told me Thade had gotten plenty of offers from apes. But he'd turned them all down. Lola often stated this wasn't his sort of thing but when I asked her why she was smirking she only nodded and waved off my question.

"Yes?" I heard him call.

"Sir?" I peeked inside. "Everyone else has left for the evening and it is getting late. Would you like for me to make you something to eat?"

"Go ahead," he put the papers down. "After that you may do whatever you wish the rest of the evening."

I settled for making him something simple. Thade was many things but picky wasn't one of them. He ate almost anything I put in front of him. He came out and actually looked like he was going to eat at the table for a change. "I'll eat outside," he motioned to the small table and chairs out there. I didn't blame him seeing as it was a lovely night out. I set it up and was about to go back inside to grab something myself when he stopped me. "Lea?"

"Yes?"

"Would you… Join me?" I looked at him a moment. He often ate in his office or grabbed something on his way out most of the time. Perhaps he got lonely as well. And I was the only one home. I softly smiled.

"Of course," I got my own things and sat in a chair near him. There were some nights one just simply did not need to be alone. We sat in perfect silence and gazed up into the night sky and at the nearby trees. Not much could be made out thanks to the think foliage but occasionally a far off light would flicker. "Sir?" I finally spoke up. "May I ask you something?"

"Go ahead," he leaned back in his seat. One hand actually rested behind his head.

"Why do you wear your armor all the time? I understand you are the head General and that your armor is important. But why do you not take it off when you return home? In case of emergencies?" It did puzzle me.

He looked at me and for a second I thought he wasn't going to answer. But he did. "Honestly, I am comfortable in it. I can spring into action at any time. It… Feels odd when I do not wear it."

"Oh." I also wondered if he wore it because he felt he needed to. Uros told me being the head of the army wasn't easy. Someone was always at you about something. With all I'd seen when I'd followed Thade around I often wondered if he felt he just couldn't win.

"Lea?"

"Yes?"

"What were your previous owners like?" I stared at him a moment. "You do not often speak of them. Were they kind to you?"

"Yes," I answered and felt very uneasy. I knew I couldn't outright tell him what was going on like I did Lola. I'd have to let Uros, and possibly Lola too, do it. "Like they were family. I never felt beneath them in anyway." I couldn't help but think back to Leo and everyone else aboard the Oberon. That seemed like a lifetime ago. My shoulders sagged when I thought of my brother and his lost pod.

~*~

Thade noticed how her demeanor had changed and he knew he'd brought up painful memories. He nearly grunted when he remembered he still hadn't located her brother for her. He did not wish to see her in distress and decided to change the subject. "I am impressed by what you did the other day." She looked back up at him.

"Thank you."

"I... Should be the one saying that," he glanced away. "You stepped in at your own risk for my benefit."

"No problem sir," she smiled at him when he looked back. "You would've done the same for me."

"Yes," he admitted as they elapsed back into a comfortable silence. The night air cooled around them as they continued watching the stars. Eventually the comets passed by as he'd been hearing about. To him it was routine. He'd seen them many times over the years and never honestly thought much about them. His mother had often told him that if he closed his eyes and made a wish then it would come true.

He happened to peek over and see what Lea was doing. He'd never seen that look on her face before. It was… Enchanting. Her smile took up her entire face and her eyes appeared full of wonder. "Wow," she finally gasped out. "Can you believe it?" she asked him with that look lightly grabbing one of his hands in hers as if to draw his attention. He couldn't find it in him to answer. "It's so beautiful."

"Yes… Beautiful." He kept staring and wondered if she would ever look at him with that sort of wonder. Her hand felt soft and warm in his. Just like that other night.

"I know it's silly," she turned back to him. "But when I was younger I was told that if you closed your eyes and made a wish it would come true. Make a wish sir," she smiled at him as she closed her eyes. She didn't let go of his hand.

He continued to look at her as she made whatever silent wish she wanted. He wondered what it was. But he looked down and found it didn't bother him she'd simply grabbed him like she had. Instead he found his own hand curling around hers and she opened her eyes. That soft smile still on her face. She glanced down and must've found he wasn't displeased by the contact. Instead she leaned back in her own seat. He hadn't seen her that relaxed before. It was… Nice. As long as she kept wearing that smile.

Thade leaned back in his own seat and found himself let out a long sigh. Her hand shifted a little in his. He wondered if she was silently asking to be released but instead found she was now holding his back. Though she was so small it was nearly comical. They stayed there for a time before he felt her hand go lax. He glanced over and found the human sleeping where she sat.

No wonder considering the lateness of the hour. Thade felt himself not too far off and knew if he didn't get up soon they'd both be asleep in the chairs. With a small grunt of dissatisfaction he got out of his chair but still kept ahold of her hand. He didn't think about it as he scooped her up in his arms still managing to keep her one hand in his own. She might as well have been a doll. He moved his fingers briefly over her soft skin before he took her inside. Even in the darkness it was easy for him to find her room and place her in her bed.

Lea grumbled a little in her sleep but otherwise didn't stir. Thade stood there a moment unable to look away. It reminded him of the time he'd basically used her as a pillow. She'd been so warm and was softer than any pillow could be. He missed that… But there was no reason for her to sleep with him now. He was not a child nor was he ill. Yet his bed looked less and less tempting by the moment.

Thade looked at her hand one more time before he put it down and left the room. The small distance to his own room might as well have been miles. He was on autopilot as he took off his armor and replaced it with more casual wear. But even as he fell into bed he couldn't help but notice how it now seemed as solid as a rock. Though he doubted anything could truly

compare to Lea… He lightly snarled into the night air as he attempted to push the human out of his mind. Too bad he couldn't do the same in his dreams.

Dreams

Both Thade and Lea shifted in their sleep. Dreams plagued them as the night went on. Neither knew the plight of the other.

Thade came home like he did every day. "Welcome home sir," Lea greeted him at the door.

"Lea," he patted her head. Things became a little blurry as time continued. Yet Lea remained a constant. She made him dinner, worked with him, and asked him about his day. Thade soaked up the amount of attention he was receiving from the normally busy human. He didn't think about the absence of the rest of the family as they spent the day together.

"Is something wrong?" she inquired as he lounged back on the couch.

"The Senate is unhappy once again."

"You'll find a way," she smiled at him and he felt himself relax a little. "You always do. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Come here," he told her. She came and sat next to him. He opened his arms and she leaned into him without hesitation. "You're incredibly soft," he heard himself say. She didn't reply but he did hear her let out a small chuckle.

~*~

"Lea," she heard her name called. She put down what she'd been doing and went out to the patio area.

"Yes?" she inquired seeing Thade lounging on one of the chairs.

"Sit with me," he told her.

"Ok," she sat down and enjoyed taking a break. She was just starting to get comfortable when he spoke again.

"You would not leave if given the chance?" he seemed to ask out of nowhere. "Would you?" She looked over to see his face. Gone was his usual scowl and a worried expression replaced it.

"No sir," she found herself saying and stretched out her hand. He immediately put out his own. She wasn't threatened by the size difference between them. But instead found a strange sort of comfort.

"You swear?" he was looking at her as if she were the only other being in the universe. It made her blush.

"I swear," she found herself saying.

~*~

Thade felt so content he never wanted to move again. Lea fit so nicely against him. He lazily ran one of his hands through her hair. She snuggled further into him and he couldn't help but let out a small sound of approval. Something in the back of his mind was telling him this wasn't appropriate but he ignored it in favor of holding her more snuggly to himself.

~*~

"May I sit with you?" she found herself saying. Though for some reason she found no fault in asking it. Neither did Thade as he scooted over and allowed her to sit down. She felt him put an arm around her shoulders and she looked up to smile at him. He leaned in and nuzzled the side of her face. She knew it was a sign of affection and nuzzled back out of contentedness.

~*~

"Sir?" Lea asked him. Her eyes were so mesmerizing. "Can I tell you something?" she gently nuzzled the side of his face. He wasn't shocked by the act but welcomed it.

"Go on," he answered pulling her as closely as possible and nuzzling her back.

~*~

"Lea," Thade nearly whispered to her. "I have something to tell you."

"Yes," she all but sighed back. She hadn't felt this relaxed in years. He seemed hesitant so she gently nudged him on.

~*~

Lea leaned up so that she was eye level with him. "I… Care for you."

"And I you," he told her. Something in the pit of his stomach tightened.

"Yes… And I appreciate that. But I love you." She looked at him with a mixture of love and fear. His heart practically stopped.

~*~

She leaned back against him as he tightened his grip a little. Not enough to hurt her but nearly enough to take the wind out of her lungs. "I want you Lea. For only myself. I want you to stay by my side always."

"What are you…"

"I love you."

~*~

I gasped, sat up in bed, and grabbed the sheets out of instinct. That… Was one hell of a dream. I shifted a little and had no idea at the time Thade was doing much the same in his own room. I had some trouble getting back to sleep after that.

The next morning I felt nearly dead on my feet. Plus I noticed Thade was acting a little weird. Like he was avoiding me or something. I was thankful when everyone came back home and I could put the dream behind me. Though Lola kept glancing between Thade and me like she knew something we didn't.

~*~

"What's wrong brother?" Lola asked once they were alone. "You do not seem to be yourself." He didn't answer for a moment but she could tell he was mulling it over. "You can tell me." So Thade related to her the details of the dream and how he hadn't been able to look at the real Lea the same way afterwards.

"What do you think sister?" he asked and she could tell he was as exhausted as Lea was.

"You have never put merit into dreams before," she told him. "I would not let this bother you."

"But I have not had that sort of dream since I was young. Let alone with… A human."

Lola sighed and slightly shook her head. She patted her brother on the shoulder. "A dream is a dream Thade. Nothing more. Though I would not act so openly about it. Or Lea might start to believe you do not like her."

~*~

"What do you think?" I asked Lola once I got a chance. "I've never had that sort of dream before."

"Oh Lea," she patted my hand. "Do not let it trouble you. Sometimes these things happen."

"Then why are you smiling like you know something?" I asked. "By the way do you know what's up with Thade lately? He seems distracted."

"He's just busy with work. Perhaps you could assist him later."

"Yeah, that sounds like a good idea."

Lost in Translation

Chapter Notes

I cannot speak Spanish so please forgive me if I make a mistake in this chapter. Translations are at the end of the story if you're interested.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I was thankful when things went back to normal the next few days. This Zaius fellow left but unfortunately Seneca had to go with him. Shiva needed his assistance elsewhere. I felt bad for Lola and tried to keep her occupied. She attempted to wave it off but I could tell she was a little upset over him leaving. On the bright side Zira, Cornelius, and Galen came back. Humans were acting up in another sector and they were called to consult. But things quieted down as quickly as they began.

Life became rather content and a little dull to tell the truth. But I wasn't about to complain. Another plus was that Thade's work lessened a bit and he wasn't as uptight as usual. That was saying something. Although that changed when we learned a group of priests were coming into town for a visit. Most apes either believed in Semos or they didn't. I thought Shiva was the only one who went out and preached along with her team. But turns out others preach the word of Semos too. These priests apparently spoke in a language few knew or were allowed to learn. The language of the ancients they called it. Even Thade and Lola couldn't speak it. Uros only knew a little but when I asked stated that his children simply weren't interested in learning it and he didn't press the matter seeing as only these priests spoke the language along with a few translators.

This put some pressure on Thade to see they were properly welcomed and protected while they visited. The Senate would throw a fit if something happened to them. That's what led up to Thade, a few of his army cronies, Virgil, and myself standing near the forefront of the village waiting for them to arrive. I just came along since I was helping Thade with work. And as Lola told me I tended to keep him calm. I could visibly see his soldiers relax when they saw me with him.

Right now was a different story however. The translator that had been promised was nowhere to be seen. He was stuck in some far off village doing something. The messenger wasn't happy about telling Thade all of this and it was hard to tell what he was saying as he stuttered and stumbled over his words. Thade growled and everyone tensed except for me and Virgil.

"It'll be alright," Virgil told him.

"How?" he nearly snarled. "We have no means of communicating with our guests unless you've suddenly learned their language."

"They'll understand, sir," I gently smiled at him. "They probably received the same news you did."

"I hope you're right," he sighed and relaxed a fraction. "Here they come."

The apes in question wore orange, yellow, red, and various other colored robes. There had to be thirty or so in all. Most were orangutans but I saw some chimps, gorillas, and various other species. Some of the younger individuals helped the older ones. Some even let the older apes and monkeys ride on their backs. One older orangutan in particular was being carried by two chimps. They stopped in front of us and set him on the ground. A lemur came up and handed the ape a wooden cane. I wondered if the ape could even see at this point. His eyes were so clouded over it looked like he was blind. I could've sworn he was twice Uros' age if that was possible.

"Le damos las gracias por su hospitalidad," the ape rasped out. I was shocked. Was he speaking Spanish? That was the ancient language? Thade and the others simply stood there not entirely knowing what to do.

"We are glad you are here," Thade finally said. "I apologize for there not being a translator. Unless any of you can understand me." All of the apes and monkeys stared at him like he was an alien. This situation was going downhill fast.

"Soy joven una lástima," the orangutan replied.

I couldn't take watching Thade and the others fidget. I hoped I was right about what language they were speaking. "El General es más contentos que usted está aquí," I tried. "Lo sentimos si hay algún inconveniente para usted." Everyone literally stared at me. I fought the urge to squirm and wondered if I'd done the right thing.

All of the priests erupted and began speaking at once. It was so fast I couldn't make all of them out. Finally the older ape rose up one hand and everyone grew quiet once more. "Nos pequeña entiendes?" he asked looking right at me.

"Sí, señor. ¿Es eso un problema?" I asked. I felt like he was boring into my soul. I silently thanked God I'd taken Spanish in school. Not to mention a few of the other handlers were fairly fluent in Spanish and helped me not forget.

"No en un todo especial. El mero hecho inesperado. Por favor, continúe."

~*~

Thade stared at Lea for quite some time. Even after he instructed her what to tell the priests. How did she know the language of the ancients? Humans were not allowed by most of their owner to even read. Let alone learn such a rare and important language. Wait a moment… Perhaps her previous owners turned to the religion or something. The priests were renowned for how they accepted nearly anyone. It wasn't reported they ever accepted humans but they detested the treatment of humans. Maybe it wasn't so far-fetched she'd been raised by them or by apes who'd turned to that religion.

It would certainly explain a lot. But if that was the case then why would she and her missing brother ever leave them? Surely the priests would have protected them or treated them fairly. He'd have to inquire later on the matter.

~*~

It was easy enough to translate and the priests were all nice. They didn't fuss as they were allotted one of the houses usually meant for meetings. It was the only one large enough to accommodate them all. Turns out the oldest ape was named Nieves and he was sort of their leader. All of the others looked up to him anyway. He was curious to say the least. He didn't speak much but insisted that I stay near him and the others. He didn't say why. Not to mention he asked if I'd hold onto his free hand and help him instead of having the two chimps from earlier carry him around.

"¿Hay algo más que usted necesita, señor?"

"Ningún niño. Estamos bien. ¿Puedo decirte algo?" I was a little surprised but nodded. "Sé joven cuidado. Semos te ha elegido por una razón. Si usted nos permite juntos podemos descubrirlo."

I didn't know how to answer that and was thankful when Thade told me it was time to leave. These priests weren't creeping me out or anything but I couldn't shake the feeling there was more to them than they were letting on. I felt I'd discover what this feeling meant very soon.

Chapter End Notes

"We thank you for your hospitality."

"I am sorry young one."

"The General is most pleased you are here."

"We are sorry if there is any inconvenience for you."

"You understand us small one?"

"Yes sir. Is that a problem?"

"No at all special one. Merely unexpected. Please continue."

"Is there anything else you need sir?"

"No child. We are fine. May I tell you something?"

"Be careful young one. Semos has chosen you for a reason. If you allow us together we may discover it."

Come In

A week later.

Considering I was on a planet full of sentient apes I shouldn't have been surprised by what happened next. Nothing should have shocked me at this point. One minute I was minding my own business getting ready to turn in for the night. The next I was inhaling some sort of vapor and collapsed on the floor. Before my world went black I saw a very brightly colored robe.

~*~

A few minutes later.

"My lady," Lola awoke to see Tomo sitting on her windowsill. "I'm sorry to disturb you but this is a dire matter."

"What is it?" she inquired. He didn't show himself often.

"It's Lea. Some of those priests kidnapped her. I would've intercepted but there were too many for me to go unnoticed."

"Say no more," Lola shot up and immediately went to wake the rest of the house. Of course questions would've been raised if Tomo had rescued her. Questions that couldn't be properly answered. Which meant those priests could be doing anything to Lea and taken her anywhere. Lola didn't have much of an opinion on this apes and monkeys but she'd never heard of them doing something like this.

It didn't take long for Lola to alert the rest of the house. Her father was in no state to do much. He hadn't been very well the past few weeks. But Thade was another matter entirely. Lola had seen her brother upset, angry, and throw tantrums. He'd flip chairs, screech, and mutter curses that would have everyone near him running for cover. But this… She'd never seen him like this. His eyes barely held the seething rage. Yet when he spoke he sounded eerily calm.

"Stay here," he told her. "I will handle matters."

"What are you going to do?"

"Just stay here," he repeated. Uros didn't say anything but gave his son a knowing nod. As soon as her brother left she sent Tomo out to tell the others what was going on.

~*~

Meanwhile.

My vision was horrible blurred when I first came to. I could hear talking around me but couldn't immediately discern voices. Finally I managed to sit up and looked around. Once the world stopped spinning I realized a few things quickly. One, I was on a large pillow. Two, I was surrounded by those priests. And three, they were all speaking regular English. "What the hell is going on here?" I wondered where exactly I was. It was outside somewhere. Lit by hundreds of candles.

"Child," Nieves said. "We are sorry to do this in such a manner. But we needed you."

"Why? And I thought none of you could speak anything other than the ancient language."

"A partial truth. It is better if others do not think we understand them. They behave more openly that way."

"You lie," I returned.

"You are wise for one so young. But you have been chosen by Semos."

"How do you know?"

"There is a legend among our texts. That Semos once ordained that if a human appeared bearing two differently colored eyes then they were not to be harmed and protected at all costs. We knew you were the one when you spoke the ancient language."

"Why kidnap me?"

"To help you."

I didn't like the way he said that. "How?"

"By showing you the path of enlightenment."

~*~

Elsewhere.

Thade had gathered some of his best men for this job. The priests weren't known to be violent but they weren't known to kidnap humans either. He wasn't putting anything past them with their numbers. Against his wishes Virgil, Cornelius, Zira, and Galen joined his party. He ordinarily wouldn't allow them to be put in danger like this. But he didn't have time to argue and had no way of knowing what awaited him.

Thankfully it wasn't hard to find the priests after searching their deserted building. The priests were clever in using the cover of night but didn't get very far. Perhaps they knew they'd be pursued and didn't bother to run like they could. It only took half an hour to locate them.

They were in a clearing and had lit a multitude of candles. Not the best thing if they were trying to evade him. He was greeted with the apes and monkeys as they stood there in a circle.

"General," one young chimp spoke up. "We've been expecting you."

Thade narrowed his eyes. He didn't like to be played for a fool. "Where is your leader?"

"Here," the older chimp joined them as some of the younger apes stepped aside. "We know why you have come."

"Where is she?" He didn't answer but indicated toward the center of the circle. Thade and the others dismounted their horses and pushed past the priests. They found Lea alright. She was sitting on a large pillow in the middle of all of this. She was staring up at the sky with an odd look on her face. Her eyes looked twice their normal size and her mouth was slightly open.

"Oh dear!" Zira cried out and immediately went to her side. Cornelius and Galen joined her. "Lea? Can you hear me?" She waved a hand in front of the human's face but she didn't respond. She didn't even blink. It was like she wasn't home.

"What did you do to her?" Thade growled grabbing the older ape by his robe.

"She has been chosen by Semos. It is our duty to help her on her path of enlightenment."

"They drugged her," Cornelius told him.

"She is in another plan," the older ape went on. "Seeing things only a few of us have ever had the pleasure to witness."

"How long until the drugs wear off?" Virgil inquired and gently prodded Thade to release the older ape. Killing him wouldn't solve anything.

"She will be fine by tomorrow."

"But that's not right now," Zira said. "She's having some sort of reaction." While Lea wasn't fully there she'd begun to move. She was able to grasp at Galen's hand he offered her and her eyes darted around like she was looking for something. "It's alright dear," Zira tried to reassure her. "You're safe."

"I…I…" Lea sounded frantic like she hadn't heard the female chimp. "I can't see anything. Oberon? Oberon?! Can you hear me?" she wobbly got to her feet but the three chimps around her kept her from trying to run off. "Come in!"

"She's hallucinating," Cornelius stated. "We need to get her somewhere safer than this."

"She'll have to ride with someone," Galen spoke up. "Or she could hurt herself."

"Pericles!" Lea cried out and tried to get out of her friend's grasps. "Can anyone hear me?"

"Deal with this," Thade told Virgil. "I'll take her. We'll go to your home." He motioned for them to hand Lea over to him. They hesitated but then Lea started screaming like she was dying and they knew this was gonna get ugly. Thade snatched Lea up like she was a child and hoped on his horse. He placed her in front of him and held her with one arm.

"Leo!" she began sobbing. "Where are you? Brother! Leo answer me!"

All the Night

I felt myself seemingly come back to my body. It was like floating on a cloud and coming down. Odd. Then again having a mysterious powder thrown in your face a second time might do that to you. When I opened my eyes I knew it was daylight and I recognized that I was in Zira's home. "Wha?" I leaned up and my head swam.

"You're awake," Zira rushed in and handed me a cup of water. "You had us worried for a while."

"What happened?" I asked.

"What's the last thing you remember?"

"Those priests grabbed me and then the last thing I know they threw some type of powder in my face." My headache was going away. "Then nothing."

"It wasn't pretty," she bluntly told me. "Lola told us about it and we were worried sick. Thade most of all."

"Really?"

"Oh yes. He organized a party to go out and find you. We did. But you were drugged and hallucinating. Talking out of your head."

My stomach twisted in a knot. What if I said something about who I really was? "What did I say?"

"Nothing that made sense," she patted my hand assuredly. "Something about the name Oberon? Then someone named Pericles. But then you started screaming for your brother."

"I did?" I didn't remember any of it. It was like my mind went blank.

"We decided it would be best to bring you here so we could observe you and make sure you were alright. It was a sight. Thade placed you on his horse and road you all the way here. Then you couldn't walk and he carried you up to the house. The way you clung to him I thought we'd never get you separated."

"Oh crap," I sighed and ran my hands through my hair.

"I wouldn't think anything of it," she told me. "He ordered us to take care of you while he dealt with the priests. I'm afraid they'll be released seeing as this is their first offense. But they're no longer welcome here. Thade used some colorful language with them. I doubt they'll come back."

All I could do was sit there as Zira got me something to eat. Something told me the priests wouldn't bug me anymore. They did what they came to do as far as I was concerned. Trying

to help me see what path 'Semos" had planned for me. I wasn't overtly angry with them but I was happy to see them gone. Thankfully everyone seemed to write off what I'd screamed while hallucinating. They thought I was completely out of my mind.

But it made me think. Pericles… Leo… Oberon. It had been so long since I'd seen any of them. Would I ever? I doubted it. Surely I would've seen them by now. I was really stuck on this planet. Alone. No… Not alone. Lola and the others were there for me. But even they could only do so much. My brother… He was really gone. I couldn't help it as I started crying for the only family I'd had.

Zira didn't exactly know why I was upset but she didn't need to. She hugged me and told me everything would be alright. I'd be ok. And they were there for me. Cornelius and Galen made brief appearances until she ushered them away. I wasn't sure why but when she hugged me it reminded me of how my mom used to comfort me. It was nice.

~*~

Later that day, seeing as I was fine now I was allowed to go home. Layla was all over me. If it wasn't for Zena I don't think she would've given me a moment alone. Lola was understanding and when I finally got a moment I thanked her and Tomo. Turns out he alerted her what was going on and I didn't blame him for not wanting to be seen by these guys. Uros welcomed me back but he had to quickly retire back to bed. I had the sickening feeling he wasn't going to be with us much longer.

Then there was Thade. He didn't say much the entire day and seeing as Lola had me on bed rest I didn't see much of him as he worked with Virgil who'd dropped by. I'd clung to him? He came to save me? Was he really worried? And had I said anything to him? I dreaded finding out but knew I couldn't avoid him forever. However, it threw me off when he was the one who came to see me and not the other way around.

I looked surprised when he came into my room and handed me some water. "Are you well?" he inquired.

"Yes," I answered putting the cup aside. "Thank you, sir."

"Did they…" he sat in the one chair in the tiny room and grabbed my hand. "Harm you?"

"No," I gently smiled. "You came just in time."

"Not fast enough," he scowled.

"But you still saved me. I'm sorry."

"You have nothing to be sorry about," he stared at me. "I was the one who let this happen. I should've seen the way they looked at you. I swear this will never happen again."

"You didn't know what they were gonna do. No one did. Sir?"

"Hm?" he turned my hand over and messed with it. Drawing patterns across it.

"Did I say anything to you while I was hallucinating?"

"Yes," he answered. "You cried for your brother. Then… You cried out for me."

~*~

Flashback.

"Thade," she cried out snuggling as far against his armor as she could. "Where are you?"

"I'm here," he held her tighter.

"I'm scared," she admitted and he saw the tears running down her face. "Will you come for me?"

"Always," he answered. She nearly refused to let go of him after he carried her to the house.

"Don't leave," she begged somehow managing to look up into his face. Her large eyes still glossed over and unfocused. "Please."

It nearly broke his heart the way she asked it. "Alright, but you must let go of me so the doctor may help you."

"Hold my hand?" she asked.

"Of course." He patted her hair.

~*~

Present.

"I stayed the night," he finished. "But I had to leave in the morning to handle matters."

I'd asked him to stay and cried out for him? I didn't get the feeling he'd lie about something like this. "You stayed with me?"

"I did."

"Why?" I couldn't help but ask the question. He hated humans. So why was it he seemed to care so much about what I thought? Why would he bother to watch out for me like he did? He must care about me… But to what extent and why?

He didn't look at me and I found he still held my hand. "I…" he started. "Do not know." This time he looked at me. "Why do you care like you do for myself? I understand the others. Lola, Layla, and Zena. Even my father. Yet you seek me out. You work so hard to help me. You always try to comfort me if I am upset. Why is that?"

He turned those tables quick. Why did I do all of that? It wasn't just for Lola or the others. It wasn't because I had an overtly kind heart. I knew why… I might not want to think about it but I understood. There was no running away from it. And Thade had his suspicions so it

wasn't like I could hide it. Not like he could reciprocate though. "I… Care for you," it was my turn not to look at him.

Thade stared at her a few moments but she didn't go on. She couldn't look at him. "I understand," he replied continuing to hold onto her. They sat there for what must've been hours. Neither saying a word. They didn't need to. They understood. Just like they both understood this could never be. It was why Thade didn't answer her in return. But they continued to hold onto one another. As if they could communicate simply through touch everything they felt. It was true. No words would've been good enough for them. Nor would they have helped. Yet they stayed together. All the night.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

The rainy season finally came to an end as all things do. It was hard saying goodbye to everyone. Zira, Cornelius, and Galen were headed back to continue their research. And Virgil was off to take care of senate matters. Zena was upset and I saw her and Virgil share a quick moment together before we parted. We were going to miss them but we'd keep in touch. The good thing about returning to the main house was that I'd get to see Ari again. We hadn't talked with her in a good while.

She was as happy to see us as we were her. "It was boring without you lot," she told us whispering so that Thade wouldn't overhear as we moved back into the house. "You'd be surprised how unintelligent some apes can be." Boy did we have a time telling her what all happened to us.

Uros returned back to his own home. He was weaker than normal and everyone in the family made sure to visit him every day. I could see Lola getting ready for the inevitable. Thade was another matter. I think he saw the state his father was in but I don't think he was ready to face it. When Uros finally did pass it was going to be bad.

We soon settled back into our old routine. And although Attar and Thade wasn't as open as Ari was with us I could tell they were happy to see one another. As for me and Thade… Well I don't want to say it got complicated or anything. It honestly wasn't. We went about our normal business and I continued to help him at work from my little desk. But at night before we would go to sleep we'd spend some time together. We didn't talk or anything but would often just sit there. Sometimes we'd both be reading and sometimes we simply watched the stars. It was pleasant.

Though now Thade insisted I sleep in his room. Not entirely sure how that conversation between him and Lola went. But she wouldn't sign off on it without me being ok. I agreed not really seeing a problem with it. The couch in his room was really comfortable. Heck it was better than the bed I'd been in. Thade seemed calmer as a result. If he had more of a peace of mind because I slept in his room then it didn't matter.

~*~

"What would you like for your birthday Layla?" Thade asked her one night. Her big day was only a week away. Lola, Zena, and I were already set for her. Thade not so much and of course he was going to be blunt and ask her.

"I want a human," she said without missing a beat. Lola looked startled and I saw Zena nearly drop the plate she was holding.

"We already have a human honey," Lola smiled at her.

"Your mother is right," Thade affirmed not missing a beat. "Wouldn't you rather have a new dress or a doll?"

"No," she seemed dead set on this. "I want a human. Lea's always too busy working to play with me," she went on. "I want someone my own age to have fun with."

Thade and Lola shared a look. "We will discuss this later," Thade stated as we finished up dinner.

"She only wants a playmate," Lola told him after Layla went to bed.

"Then she can have regular friends."

"Brother," Lola looked cross at him. Thade knew Layla's situation with making friends. He'd crossed a line and I knew nothing he said after that could save him. In his defense he did beat a hasty retreat.

"Hn," he grumbled. "She's not old enough to take care of a human. Lea's an exception but a young human sister?"

"She won't be doing this alone," Lola replied. "She'll learn responsibility, have a friend, and we'll get a new member of the family."

"Lea," Thade spoke to me and I startled.

"Yes?"

"What do you think of this?"

"Thade," Lola warned. "You cannot ask her that." Lola knew I was stuck. What was I supposed to say? I hated being a servant/pet to apes, even an awesome one like Lola who honestly was my friend and she viewed me as an equal. Yet I had to constantly play an act just like she had to. We hated it. I knew that if we didn't take in a kid then she'd go off to someone else at some point. Who knew what that family would be like? There was no guarantee there. At least if we brought the kid here he/she would be taken care of. A pampered pet in everyone else's eyes. But to the rest of us, even Layla, she/he would be a new family member. What would this kid even thing and where would they have come from? I was basically deciding between the lesser of two evils. Great.

"I… Will go with your decision," I stated and let out a heavy sigh. Lola gave me a sympathetic look and Zena gently patted me on the back once Thade wasn't looking.

~*~

Later that night though there was no getting away from him as I helped him get out of his armor before bed. "You realize if we do decide to adopt a human child you will have to help care for it."

"I understand."

"Does that bother you?" He looked at me as I put a piece of armor aside. "You may tell me the truth."

"Not taking care of the child. Merely everything else." Thade didn't answer but I could see by the tension in his shoulders he got the message.

The next morning Thade announced we'd go and adopt a human child for Layla on her birthday. She was so happy she basically used Thade as a tree. He actually had a thin smile on his face from that. I understood why he did it. I couldn't say I was happy about this. But it was my life. Leo and Oberon weren't going to magically show up and save me. But I had hope. Layla was smart like Lola. Hopefully with her new friend she'd be able to change the future. Not soon seeing as they're children but one day. Maybe I'd be able to see humans and apes as equals on this planet. Or the beginning of that.

I thought about all of my friends. They treated me as their equal. Even Seneca was working from the inside of ignorance itself to try and change things for the better. Even Thade. Good Lord Thade. He'd come a good way I'd say that much. But… Sometimes I couldn't help it as I felt a sharp stab. I just wished he'd gotten farther in his outlook change. Perhaps I was asking too much.

Little did I know that the day we all went to pick out a human for Layla would be a pivotal moment in my life. It would alter everything once again. My entire life on this planet of the apes would be turned upside down… The true battle would soon begin.

Leo

We visited Uros most of that week. He wasn't doing overtly well. I could tell his time was almost up and so could everyone else. Thade came with us just as often and I could tell this was having a bad impact on him. We tried to spare Layla most of it and she was just excited to be seeing her grandfather so much. I don't think she fully understood what was going on.

Finally the big day arrived. We made a nice day out of it. Lola took everyone out to lunch and then Zena returned home early to get dinner ready. Not to mention put out the presents we already got for Layla. Meanwhile, I accompanied everyone else to the human place. I wasn't looking forward to it but still… Better I go than be surprised at home. Thade stated he would be meeting us there.

On our way we passed by some kids playing ball. I even caught a glimpse of Ari and some other female chimp I didn't know. We exchanged smiles and continued on our way. We met up with Thade not long after that. "Come Layla," she placed her hand in his. "I will get you your present."

"Thank you Uncle Thade!" she gushed and we had to wait a minute for her to settle down. Lola walked next to me and put a reassuring hand on me. I'd been to these types of places before thanks to Thade's work but I never liked them. The sooner we got this over with the better. Turns out Attar would be coming with us as well. I wasn't too surprised seeing as he and Thade were buds.

We heard a commotion as the guy in charge, Limbo, told one of his subordinates he should wear his gloves while handling humans. I supposed someone bit him. Can't say I was shocked. He immediately turned his attention to us when we showed up.

"You're getting soft, Limbo," Thade told him. "You normally hack off a limb."

"Uh, yes, General. That's true," he laughed and I could tell he was nervous. Thade had that effect on nearly everyone. "But, unfortunately, they're worth more intact." We walked by the cage holding the adult males when Attar stopped. "Keep your eye on this one," he said and I nearly shit my pants when I saw who he was talking about.

Sitting right there was my brother. Leo. I stopped and while the others didn't notice it Lola did. She looked in between us and I mouthed his name. We noted how the two were eyeing him. She gently patted my shoulder and I motioned for Leo to stay down when he noticed me. It must've been hard for him because he looked ready to spring up. Instead, he sat back down and looked away like he had no clue who I was. This was not good…

Leo was alive? Thank the stars and heavens! But this was also a major problem. He'd been captured and clearly neither Thade nor Attar liked him by the way they spoke. Then again they didn't like me either when I first showed up. But by what they were talking about I doubted Thade would want to buy him even though he'd promised me he'd find my brother. How was I supposed to get to him and make sure he was safe? I knew Lola would help me out because she kept her hand on my shoulder as she gently steered me along with the group.

I tuned out most of what they were talking about. My mind must've been in some sort of shock. After all these months… My brother was here. He was alive. I could work with him being alive. I'd just have to play my cards right.

"I promised my niece a pet for her birthday," Thade told Limbo as we stopped at the cage holding the kids. Layla went right up to the bars.

"Excellent," Limbo gushed. "Oh, the little ones make wonderful pets." He went over and stood next to Layla as Thade walked over to us. He patted Lola on the shoulder and then did the same to me. His arm hung on my shoulder. "Oh but be sure to get rid of it by puberty. One thing you don't want in your house, it's a human teenager. That one you got there," he motioned to me. "Is the exception and what lovely eyes." Thade lightly snarled at him and Limbo went back to Layla.

She was making excited noises. "Oh, yes. Any one you'd like, sweetheart?" Thade lightly growled as Limbo put a hand on Layla's shoulder. Couldn't blame him.

"That one," she motioned pointing to a dirty little blonde girl. Did I see her before or was I imagining it?

"Oh, isn't she pretty." Thade got up and snarled at him while Layla came bolting back over to us. Me and Lola put a reassuring arm on her while Thade scared the crap out of Limbo. "I'll get that for you, sir."

He opened the cage and snatched the little girl up before handing her to Attar. Layla giggled as she was placed in front of us. Attar gently patted her head as she looked at the ground. Then she immediately latched onto my legs like she was hugging me. "Look Mommy!" Layla was so excited. "She already likes Lea."

"I can see that sweetie," Lola smiled at the little girl as I picked her up. She hugged me for dear life. Probably because I was the only other human and we were surrounded by apes. I could only guess how scared she was. "And I have a pretty new collar just for you," Limbo dangled a silver jeweled collar in front of Layla. She snatched it out of his hand. "Compliments of the house." Then Thade got right up in his face and sniffed him. If I hadn't already learned his mannerisms by now I would've thought that was odd or terrifying. Instead, I stifled a giggle as Limbo froze.

"You stink," Thade told him before he ushered us away. I did let out a little chuckle at that and Thade smiled at me. But before we left I happened to glance back at my brother. He still sat there but his eyes were glued to me. But I had to turn back around as Thade steered me away putting a hand on my shoulder again. I placed the little girl on the ground so she could walk on her own, she was getting a bit heavy. Layla wasted no time putting the collar on her. But instead of a lease, she grabbed the little girl's hand and led her along talking a million miles an hour.

My mind reeled though with thoughts of my brother and how I could get to him. Thankfully my answer came when we happened to see Ari standing a distance away coming out of that place. Lola excused herself for a moment as Thade and Attar jumped on their horses. They waited until Lola came back from talking to Ari before they left. I wouldn't be going with

Thade today to help the new girl settle into the house. But Lola said something to Thade too as I watched over Layla and the girl.

Lola gave me a knowing smile and said Leo was in good hands. In fact, I'd see him tonight. Later we were going to pay Uros another visit. There we'd met up with Thade and he'd take me with him. He had to go to some sort of dinner. It was important and he couldn't get out of it. Thankfully Layla was so happy playing with the little girl she didn't even want a special birthday dinner. She just wanted to sit up in her room and play. So she wouldn't notice I was even gone. Thade had dragged me to a couple of these things before and Lola had talked him into taking me to this one. I did do wonders for his interactive skills by having a calming effect on him. It would only help him. And who was hosting this dinner? None other than Ari's father.

I felt tears spring to my eyes. Finally, after so long. I'd see Leo. I'd finally get to see my brother. I'd get my brother back.

We're Really Doing This

Those hours might as well have been days. I paced and we immediately told Zena what was happening nearly as soon as we got in the door. She didn't say anything but nodded and looked after the child, whose name we found out was Didi, and Layla as they cleaned up and went to Layla's room. Lola tried to reassure me and we went to see Uros at once. He could barely get out of his bed anymore. But he nodded his head.

"It is… As I predicted," he said. "Others will look for you both."

"I know," I told him holding his hand. "And I will uphold my promise. But first I have to get to Leo and see what state his equipment is in. I doubt he looked like that because he had a flawless landing."

"What will you do?" Lola inquired looking a little sad.

That was a good question. What was I going to do? If Leo's ship was scrapped we were both stuck here. I was comfortable where I was and I hoped I could talk Leo into laying low with Ari. But my brother had a stubborn streak and no doubt he'd get into trouble eventually. There was also the possibility we could salvage his equipment. If that was so we could contact the Oberon. We could go home.

My heart sank. I knew Leo would want to. But did I? I'd miss all of the friends I'd made here. Lola, Zena, Galen, Zira, Cornelius, Seneca, Virgil, and all the others. They'd done so much for me. How could I leave them without saying goodbye? And not all of them knew my entire story. I rubbed my now throbbing temple. Then there was Thade. Everything came to a stop where he was concerned. I… Liked him. What would he think of all of this if he found out? He was in the dark too. Yet, I thought he cared about me. In some way. Maybe I was wrong. But could I just fly off this planet with my brother and never look back? I knew Leo wouldn't force me but he wouldn't leave me here either. He probably had as many questions as I did about this planet. He was no doubt worried sick after he saw me with Thade and the others. My stomach was doing flips.

"I'll have to see what options are available," I finally said. In my heart I knew I didn't want to go. This planet of the apes had grown on me. And I loved all those who had helped me along the way. "I just hope Leo's safe."

"Ari will look after him," Lola smiled at me. I didn't have long to ponder matters after that when Thade arrived. All of us knew we'd have to tell him the truth soon. Uros especially due to his health. Didn't mean it didn't make my gut wrench at the mere thought.

We left after a short bit and arrived at Ari's house. I'd only met her father a few times but he seemed nice enough. Treated me decently. There was also this General Krull fellow. I guess back in the day he worked with Thade and Attar. Something happened and now he was reduced to working for the senator. He wasn't mean as far as I could tell. But it didn't look like he cared for Thade or Attar.

Looks like we were the last ones to show up. Thade always was one for entrances. There were a few other senators there with what I guessed were their wives. Thade was right in one regard. These dinners were always boring as shit. Ari didn't look happy one bit.

I pulled a chair out for Thade and he sat down next to the senator. Other human servants filtered around the table as Attar sat down as well. I noticed Leo off to the side with Krull holding a giant plate of food. We briefly nodded before going back to acting like we didn't know each other.

Once again the conversation around the table went to humans. How we were becoming a problem. Thade didn't say much but let out low growls now and then as everyone else conversed on how to deal with us. Ari spoke up and mentioned how we have a culture and should be treated as equals. She even got her father into it. He looked reluctant but agreed with his daughter.

Thade was nowhere near happy about any of this. He glanced at me once or twice as the other senators laughed at how they thought humans were stupid and only interested in procreating. Though it was funny when the fat senator reached for a fruit and Attar growled and banged his fist on the table. Attar was a religious guy as he made them all pray. Ari shot me a look while this was going on.

Leo came around and served everyone before Krull and him went back into the kitchen area. Ari briefly nodded at what seemed like nothing but I got her point. I waited until Thade was through talking before I asked. "Sir?" He knew I only asked one thing at a time like this.

"Go," he told me. I made a beeline right for the kitchen instead of the bathroom. "Leo!" I had to keep from yelling as I spotted him.

"Lea!" he replied and we hugged. "What? How?"

"I'll explain later. Not like I got all the answers. I'm just so happy you're alive!"

"Who's this?" a familiar blonde woman asked.

"This is my sister," Leo told her. "Mind telling me what the hell's going on around here?"

"Basically? Apes run the place and we don't. End of story. Stay down and stay low. You'll be fine. Ari's a friend of mine so you're in good hands for now. Now, where's your ship?"

"I crashed in a lake. What about yours?"

"An ocean. Is the lake nearby?"

"Not far away," he answered looking around. General Krull came into the room and let out a low growl at us.

"Oh let them be," Ari told him coming in. "It's not every day a family gets to be reunited."

"Ari," I ran over and briefly hugged her. "Thank you so much."

"How can you be friends with them?" the blonde inquired.

"Long story."

"We're getting out of here," Leo told me.

"It's far too dangerous," Ari told him. "You'll be safer here with me."

"Did any of your equipment survive?" I asked.

"Only one way to find out. But we have to try and reach the Oberon. How do we get out of here?"

"I can show you the way and I'm Daena," the blonde told us. "But not without my family."

"Alright," Leo nodded.

"Wait a minute," I spoke up. "If we are going to do this we have to be clever about it. We'll do it later when no one's around. Ari," I turned to her. "You didn't hear any of this. I don't want you getting in trouble after all you did for me."

"Not a problem," she told me. "But I still think you two should stay here."

"Noted but I'm taking my sister and getting us the hell out of here."

"The others will be suspicious soon," Krull told us.

"Ok Leo," I turned to him. "Stay put and I'll be back later. Ari, thanks again for everything." I bolted back out to the main room as the dinner resumed. I kept myself from fidgeting. So we were really doing this? Tonight? Oh crap I had a headache thinking about it. But there was no going back.

"You seemed distracted tonight," Thade commented after we'd left. Attar had already begun heading the other way toward his own home.

"It's… Nothing, sir." I was really leaving. I'd have to hurry to say goodbye to Lola and everyone back at the house. But… "Sir?"

"Yes?"

"I just wanted to say thank you."

"For what?"

"Everything." He didn't get to comment on that when two gorillas walked up and said they wanted him to see something. My blood ran cold but I acted normal. I hoped they hadn't found Leo's ship. Or evidence of it seeing as it was in a lake.

"Very well. Lea, you may continue home. I will be along shortly."

"Yes, sir." I took my time walking away before I briefly looked back at him. This could be the last time I'd ever see him again. Tears appeared in my eyes and I began running toward the house. I didn't have long to get ready for tonight and say my goodbyes. My heart felt like it was beating out of my chest but I didn't care. It was already breaking. "Goodbye… Thade," I said to no one as I made it back home.

Always

"We will miss you," Lola hugged me and I could tell she was trying to hide her tears as well. Zena stood off to the side and held a bag they'd made up for me. "I will tell father and Layla goodbye for you."

"Thanks," I sniffled looking at Zena.

"It was nice having someone to talk to," Zena handed me the bag but I hugged her. She went stiff a moment before she returned the hug.

"Same here."

"Stay low," Lola repeated. "You know where the curfew guards are so you should be fine. Goodbye, my friend."

"Goodbye Lola," I returned her sad smile. "Thank you. For everything. And…"

"You don't need to say it," she told me. "I will try to give you a head start with Thade." Yeah, he wasn't going to be easy to avoid once he found out I was gone. "You had better go."

"Bye," I said one last time before I made my way to Ari's. Thankfully, I knew this city like the back of my hand. It wasn't hard to avoid the guards that usually patrolled the streets. Before I knew it I was at the house. Leo and Daena were already prepared to go with packs of their own.

"This is too dangerous," Krull informed Ari. "If you are caught helping them…"

"Come now," Ari waved the notion off. "Lea's a friend. I cannot just stand by while she needs assistance. Though I don't need to tell you three to be careful."

"Definitely not," I told her and gave her a quick hug. "Thanks for everything." With that we were off into the night. We had to duck behind things every once and a while to avoid guards… But other than that we were alright. Though once we had to stop and one of the guards said he smelt something. But they ignored it and we all let out a relieved sigh as we went on our way.

~*~

Elsewhere.

"You two are to tell no one of this," Thade snarled at his soldiers. "Understood?"

"Yes, sir!" they saluted. At least he knew the two of them would remain silent. In all honesty Thade felt that this couldn't be good. He had no idea what could have done this. He glared at the trees that had been destroyed by whatever had fallen from the sky. Whatever it was… Was disconcerting.

~*~

Meanwhile.

We made it to where the others were being held. "You're hurt," Daena said to her father.

"How did you get away?" the old man asked. I helped Leo as he grabbed some rope off the wall. Daena didn't answer but looked at us.

"Stand back," I said as Leo wrapped the rope around the wooden cell bars. He kept wrapping it around and used the metal bar I handed him to break the wood. The old man, a teenage boy, and another man stepped out.

"Who are you?" the old man asked us.

"Someone just trying to get the hell out of here," Leo answered.

"I'm Lea Davidson and that's my brother Leo," I explained looking around. "Now let's go before we get caught."

"She promised to show me the way back to where they caught us," Leo stated.

"We'll go together," the man said. "I'm Karubi, that's Birn, and Gunnar. But first we need to get my daughter Didi."

"Wait Didi?" I inquired.

"You know her?"

"Yeah, and she's safer where she is then if she came with us," I told him. "What we're gonna do is too risky to bring a kid along. I know we don't know each other but you're gonna have to trust me on this."

He paused a moment and looked to his remaining family. "Alright, you did save us before," he noted.

And with that our group tore off into the night. They had to follow my lead as I led them down hallways and corridors to try avoid being seen. It wasn't easy. Luckily we had the night on our side. Unfortunately, that didn't last as we ran past a group of teens apparently out on the night. They let out shrieks when they saw us like you wouldn't believe. "Crap!" I swore as I led them through some back alleys hoping guards wouldn't even worry about them this time of night. Guards were surely alerted because they seemed to have been yelling from everywhere. "Wait," I halted and they stopped behind me. I saw a shadow pass up ahead of us.

Everyone stood back as Leo pulled out a knife and I joined him in hiding as the figures approached us. We jumped whoever it was only to be smacked down. "Lea?!" a familiar voice said.

"Oh Ari," I let out a sigh as Krull released my brother. "Thank God it's just you."

"Seems you've drawn too much attention to yourselves," she told us. "You're lucky I found you before they did. You're surrounded."

"I kinda figured that," I rubbed my temples. This wasn't good at all.

"Come with me back to the house," she told us. "I can reason with them."

"We know how apes reason," Karubi spoke up.

"I think it's a bit late for that Ari," I informed her.

"Is there another way out of the city?" Leo inquired.

"We can't ask that of her," I swatted his shoulder. "She's already done too much for us!"

"For once this human is right," Krull stated. "Do net get involved."

"Why did you help me and my sister?" Leo looked right at her. "Huh? Why would you take that chance?"

"We don't have time for this!" I reminded.

"I… Cause. You're not usual," she answered. "Both of you."

"Show us a way out," Leo said. "I promise you I'll show you something that will change your world forever." She looked at him long and hard. "Trust me."

She looked around the group before she seemed to relent. "When I was little I used to sneak outside the city walls where no one could find me. I-I can show you the way."

"No Ari," I shook my head.

"If we are caught then not even your father can protect us," Krull stated.

"Trust me," Leo said again. I face palmed knowing Ari would help us. I was grateful but felt terrible for involving her at the same time.

"Then let's go," I urged and we all followed after her. Ape sounds could be heard all around us. I felt my gut tighten as we rounded a corner and were in an open space where the military headquarters were. Sure enough apes stood at attention out in front of it. We bolted for it but I noticed Daena and Birn stood behind a moment with Karubi. Ari made a sound to get moving and Leo told them, "Come on."

We all heard a sudden growl and I turned to see none other than Colonel Attar glaring at us. "Oh shit," I muttered as Leo pulled me along. This was not going to be good. Not good at all. Without warning Karubi charged right at Attar after picking up a torch. "No!" Daena and Brin screamed as we had to drag them along. We had to get out of there so quickly we didn't see what happened to the old man.

~*~

At the same time.

Attar grabbed the man's wrist that held the torch and used his strength to make the man drop it. He stared at the man before he looked behind him. A familiar figure stood there. Thade raised his fist and smashed it into the older man's head. The man fell to the ground unconscious. "What is going on around here?"

"You're not going to like it, sir," Attar answered and filled him in on a few things.

Thade snarled as he listened and had a couple soldiers drag the elderly man away to be imprisoned. "Where are the other humans?" he inquired.

"Through the tunnels," Attar answered. "They could not have gotten far."

"When you find them, kill them all." He walked around his friend. "Except for the troublemaker. I wanna talk to him before he dies."

"Sir, the senator's daughter is with them. As is… Your human."

Thade stopped him his tracks and for a moment couldn't seem to be able to breathe. He quickly turned back to the gorilla. "They took Ari and Lea?"

"They appeared to be helping them. I saw them myself."

Thade started growling and grabbed Attar's armor as if to stable himself. "They had no choice. They threatened their lives." He turned back to his friend. "I'll report the message to the senate myself. They'll beat their chests and ask for my help."

"They are weak without you, sir." Thade agreed by snarling. He looked back to where the group escaped. "I'll find you," he said so lowly none could hear him. He thought back to that night Lea had been drugged out of her mind.

Flashback.

~*~

"Thade," she cried out snuggling as far against his armor as she could. "Where are you?"

"I'm here," he held her tighter.

"I'm scared," she admitted and he saw the tears running down her face. "Will you come for me?"

"Always," he answered.

~*~

Reality.

"Always," he repeated to no one but himself as he hoped on his horse.

She'll Pay

Krull blasted through our last barrier and we were out. I couldn't believe how far away the city was from us. Ari put a reassuring hand on Daena's shoulder. "Your father was a brave man."

"What do you know about my father?" Daena turned on her.

I forced myself in between them. "Hey," I started before things got bad. "We don't have time for this. I'm willing to beat your dad's still alive. But we need to keep moving."

"She's right," Leo spoke up. "Let's go." With that we took off into the jungle. It wasn't long before we reached the lake and saw evidence of Leo's landing.

"Damn," I muttered looking at how many trees he took out. "Not much better than my landing."

"You did that?" Ari asked.

"No, my retro-burners." Leo and Krull had a little spat back and forth before he landed on my brother with a growl. "Hey!" I stated but Ari held me back.

"Apes," Krull told him. "Monkeys are further down the evolutionary ladder. Just above humans."

"I have a friend who's a lemur," I told him. "That's very offensive," I helped Leo up.

"Calm down, will you?" Ari said.

Then Ari saw the water and freaked out. "What's wrong?" Leo asked.

"They don't like water," I told him patting her reassuringly.

"We drown," she stated.

"That's why every day we pray for rain," Daena said.

"Really?" I looked at her. Leo jumped in and not long after Ari inquired, "How long can a human hold his breath under water?"

"He'll be fine," I told them knowing Leo was a good swimmer. I would've helped but I wasn't the best. Daena apparently thought she'd help cause she leapt right in. They came back up soon enough and I noticed Leo had a bag. Ari leaned down as me and Leo looked through his stuff. I lightly grabbed her hand and nodded my head when she reached for the gun. "You don't want any part of that," I told her. Leo got it instead as I brought out the tracker. It started beeping and I knew it was working.

"What's that?" Ari inquired holding a glow stick.

"It's a messenger," I answered as Leo looked over my shoulder.

"Keeps an open frequency with our ship so we can talk to them," Leo finished.

"What, it talks?"

"With radio waves."

"Sorcery," Krull growled.

"It's not sorcery," I took up. "It's science." Ari freaked when she snapped the glow stick and it glowed. Before picking it right back up. "Leo," I nodded at the beeping.

"Contact," he stated. "Jesus, they're already here."

"That was fast."

"They must be waiting for us. The messenger has a homing beacon that will lead us to them," we gathered up the rest of his equipment. Not much but better than what I landed with. "We're in control now. We're the 800-pound gorilla."

"Leo," I lightly smacked him.

"Who are you two?" Ari and the others followed us. "Really Lea?"

"Captain Leo Davidson, and private Lea Davidson. Pilots in the U.S. Air Force," Leo explained.

"We come from a planet called Earth," I finished.

"Your apes permit you to fly?" Krull questioned.

"Our apes live in zoos," Leo answered. "They do what we tell them." As a result Krull ran past us not too happy. "I think it's fair to call this hostile territory."

"Not everyone here is hostile," I told him.

"We got exactly 36 hours to rendezvous with our friends, and we're out of this nightmare." My stomach dropped when he said that.

"What happens to us?" Gunnar asked. "Where do we go?" There was a screech and we turned to see Limbo had tackled the man.

"You're going nowhere. This one still belongs to me." Gunnar reached back and smacked him before he got away.

"Stop!" Ari yelled but Krull kept her back.

"You I've had enough of!" Limbo stated. Then he turned and saw me. "My my your Thade's pet aren't you? He's not gonna be happy the next time he sees you." Before anyone could move Birn ran right at him but Limbo tripped him. The kid got back up but the orangutan

wasn't fazed and smacked him a good one. Two of Limbo's lackeys seemed to come out of nowhere and grabbed the boy. Leo's had enough and used the gun. It nearly exploded a nearby tree.

The blast was enough to freak everyone out as the gorillas dropped the kid and ran while the rest of the apes screeched and such. Leo turned the gun on Limbo. "Hey, no harm done. Come here, kid." He picked the kid up. "You're not hurt right? These kids, they bounce right back."

"Play dead," Limbo dropped to his knees and Brin ran over to his sister.

"Kill him," Daena said.

"Slave trader," Gunnar stated.

Ari stepped in front of him. "You kill him and you'll only lower yourself to his level."

"Exactly." He grabbed ahold of her clothes. "She is extremely smart. You know, I've heard her talking about apes and humans-uh uh, separate but equal, to each his own. Or something like that, right?" I noticed his back foot and nodded to Leo. He saw it. In return my brother blasted the spear the ape had been going for away. "I'm probably just in the way right now. So why don't I just get going, hmm?"

Ari grabbed him. "He'll lead them right to us," I noted.

"Then we'll make him our guest." We cuffed him but before we got any further Krull grabbed the gun and smashed it.

"Shit!" I exclaimed.

"What the hell are you doin'?" Leo questioned.

"You could use that against us," he answered.

"It would've been nice to at least have," I stated.

"Who would invent such a horrible thing?" Ari asked.

"That thing was gonna keep us alive."

"We're better off without it."

"What do you mean, 'we'?" Daena questioned.

"Must you be so difficult?" Ari countered.

"Good lord this trip is gonna be fun," I muttered.

"Shut up!" Leo shouted. "That goes for all species."

~*~

Elsewhere.

Thade worked his magic and got Ari's father to agree to getting the rest of the senate to declare martial law. He promised to retrieve the senator's daughter and kill the humans responsible for this. It appeared to work and he growled as Attar approached him. "He's not in the city."

"We underestimated this human. I will hunt him down myself." He put a hand on his friend's chest before he hoped on his horse.

"Your father sent me to find you," a servant approached him. "You must come quickly."

"Alert the outposts. Don't let the humans pass. And I want my human brought back alive…"

"I understand, sir."

"Apart from my father, I rely on you the most." He looked hard at the Colonel. "We are not just soldiers. We are friends. I am depending on you."

"Yes, sir," Attar returned the beating of his chest.

~*~

Far away.

We walked through another forest and came upon a desert like area. "So many questions I want to ask," Ari said.

"Me too," Leo replied.

"These zoos you speak of, what are they? This word is not familiar." This is what I had been dreading.

"Zoos are where you find our last few apes."

"What happened to them?" Krull questioned.

"Gone," I said. "We cut down their forests, the ones who survived were placed in cages… Hopefully to be saved."

"Or for amusement," Leo added. "Or for scientific experiments."

"That's horrible," Ari stated.

"I know," I told her. "That's why I didn't want to tell you outright."

"I can see why but it's not like you did all that by yourself Lea," she patted me on the back.

"We do worse to our own kind," Leo said.

"I don't understand. You seem to possess such intelligence."

"We're also incredibly stupid when it comes to some things," I stated.

"Our world gets more dangerous the smarter we get," Leo said.

"I knew it," Ari looked at him. "You're sensitive." Wait… Did she like Leo? "It's an uncommon quality in a male."

"Why don't your apes object to the way you treat them?" Krull broke the moment.

"Our apes can't talk," I answered.

"Maybe they choose not to given the way you treat them," Ari kept on.

"Apes in cages," Limbo said. "Right."

~*~

Back with Thade.

He entered his father's house and saw his sister there. "Have you heard?"

"Lea," she stated not meeting his gaze. "I know. But Father needs you now." He entered his father's room to find him lying there. He looked horrible… Like he could barely lift his hand to greet him. It shook horribly as Thade returned the gesture. "Father."

"I don't have much time," he put a hand on Thade's shoulder. "Tell me… About this human who troubles you."

"He kidnapped Lea," Thade replied. "But I will capture him with little trouble."

"No. You're not telling me everything. Lea… Kidnapped you say? Does that sound like her?" Thade didn't reply. "You believe this human is not born of this world. Did he come alone?"

"Yes."

"The same way Lea did…"

"Father… What are you…"

"More will come looking for him and Lea."

"How can you possibly know any of this?"

"I have something to tell you… Something my father told me and his father told him.. Back along our bloodlines to Semos." He paused as if to catch his breath. "In the time before time, we were the slaves… And the humans were the masters."

"Impossible." Seeing his son's expression he pointed to the red pot near his bead. Thade went over and smashed it. Revealing a very old gun. "What you hold in your hand is the proof of their power-their power of invention, their power of technology. Against this, our strength means nothing. This has the power of a thousand spears. Normally their ingenuity goes hand

in hand with their cruelty. But my father told me of something else. If there was ever a human with two different colored eyes this one would be different from the others…"

"Lea?"

"She is not a cruel but a friend to our kind. She is a child of the stars. They will be headed for Calima. It holds the secrets of our true beginnings. It would be best if you let them be…"

"But Father." Lea? How could this be?

"I asked Lea to guard us when the others come for her and this human. Her brother I'm assuming. Let them be and leave us in peace Thade."

"I cannot do that. I have to find her. Them."

"You care for her…" Thade didn't answer but Uros wasn't expecting him to. "Do not waste your life Thade. If you care for her then go after her. But I hope you understand why I did not tell you." He started shaking.

"Father…"

"Let go of your hatred Thade. It will not be easy but live a good life son…" He reached out one last time and Thade held his hand in his. A moment later Uros let out his last breathe and Thade sat there a moment. He looked at his father not entirely sure how to feel. He let out a low growl and then a long howl.

He ignored Lola as he stormed out of the house. It mattered little to him what she had to say at the moment. He'd find this human… Leo. And more importantly he'd find Lea. So, she had come from the stars as well? And no one had bothered to tell him until now. His emotions battled inside of him as he rode to go meet the army. She'd deceived him this entire time… She'd pay for this. But first he had to find her.

Calima

It took us a while and we were freaked by the scarecrow like things but we made our way toward Calima. Ari gave a brief history and mentioned Semos. Leo gave me a look at the familiar name but the messenger said that was where our crew was. So we pressed on. Only to find our path blocked by an army camp. But their horses were off to the side.

"Are you sure apes are afraid of water?" Leo asked.

"Positive," I answered getting his idea.

"We should cross the river another way. Over the mountains," Gunnar said.

"There's no time," I stated.

"It's dark," Leo took up. "We're going right through."

~*~

Hours later.

I was uneasy that Attar had arrived. That meant Thade wasn't far behind. But we made our way down to the horses when it got dark and grabbed the ones we needed. The others we left to run out of the enclosure. I thought it was sweet how Leo reassured Ari when she started freaking out about crossing the river.

"Yeah, well, good luck, everybody," Limbo gave us a thumbs up. "Have a nice ride." Leo went up to him as I hopped on a horse. "Just leave me. I'll slow you down."

"You're letting him go?" Gunnar asked as he un-cuffed him.

"Bless you."

"No. He'll ride with us."

"No, wait, wait. This is suicide."

"Get on your horse," I told him.

"Ride through an army encampment. Only a human would think that this could work."

"Now, before I throw you in the river myself," I reinforced as Leo let out a flare.

"Boy, I can see why Thade liked you so much," he muttered after he took a second to gawk at the flare. With that we road as the army was hopefully distracted.

We tried to ride through as quickly as possible but chaos ensued. One ape grabbed onto Limbo and tried to attack him. Limbo yelled how he wasn't with us but the ape clearly wasn't

listening. He had to punch him off. "Come on!" Leo yelled. He even grabbed a torch and used it to hit a few gorillas before tossing it into a tent. I heard a familiar growl behind us and kept going forward as I lead everyone across the river. "Hurry!" I called.

The enemy started throwing fire balls at us. I heard a yell and turned to see Ari fall off her horse. Leo was still causing trouble in the camp. "Leo! Ari!" He got tossed off his horse and ran toward Ari. I saw her hop on top of him as the enemy continued to fire and we made it across.

"Hold on!" I yelled. I felt helpless and it looked like Ari might drown Leo. I hopped in the water and helped them out as they got close. They were both way out of breath and spit out some water. "You two alright?" Ari nodded and Leo went to go sit down.

"Ow!" he exclaimed when Daena put a hand on his shoulder.

"You're hurt."

"She was holding on pretty tight."

"Soldiers will head downstream until they find a crossing," Krull pointed out. "We should move quickly."

"I agree," I stated getting up. "Let's get the hell out of here."

~*~

Meanwhile.

Attar was reporting back to Thade. "Where are they?" Thade growled.

"They crossed the river," Attar answered.

"And you didn't stop them?"

"They were carried by horses." Thade turned and snarled in his face.

"Horses?"

"Our horses, sir," Attar wisely backed up. That was all it took and Thade lost it. He jumped and ran around screeching and even cut down a lighting source before he got on his horse. His army stood silently but more than one trembled at the outburst. They all knew this was not good.

"Forgive me, my friend," Thade turned to him after he was through. "I'm not angry with you. My father was taken from me."

"He was a great leader. Your family are direct descendants of Semos. And now it is time for you to lead."

"Form the divisions."

"Form divisions!" Attar yelled. Everyone fell in line. "Full battle ready! Sound the call to march!" The army let out their own screeches as they began their steady march. Attar and Thade in the lead.

~*~

Elsewhere.

We all sat around fires trying to keep warm and rest before we continued at daybreak. I felt exhausted. "Tomorrow we reach Calima," Krull told us. He then went up and sat on top of a rock outcrop. It was then Ari filled Leo in on how Krull used to be a general until Thade… Well it wasn't pretty and I could see why Krull didn't care for Thade or Attar very much. I sat back and looked up at the stars. I only half paid attention to the conversation Leo and Ari kept up. I couldn't help but think back to all the friends I'd made on this strange world. I wondered where Tomo was and hoped he was watching over Lola and the others since I hadn't seen him. I thought of Tomoko and Zira and the others. Oh boy this couldn't be easy for Lola or Layla. And Thade… Holy shit. What was I gonna do if I ran into him?

I… Had at least gotten to say goodbye to the others. But Thade was another matter. I'd never see him again… I turned over and desperately tried to sleep. For all the anguish this place had caused me I was still going to miss this planet of the apes.

~*~

The next day.

We made some great time with the horses. But the dust around here was ridiculous. Until we came upon some ruins. That looked oddly familiar. "Leo," I grabbed onto him. We just looked at each other a moment before he checked the messenger. It told us this was the place. We ran inside and I dreaded what we would find.

Dust littered familiar halls but we found our way around. "Hello?" Leo called out. As if someone would answer us here.

"They were never here," Gunnar stated.

"You said they'd come for us," Daena said.

We didn't reply but Leo saw something in the dust. He went over and it was revealed to be a human skull. "Oh my God," I said noticing 'Calima' on the wall. I went over and found there to be caked on dust. I flung it off to reveal the words, 'Caution Live Animals.' Suddenly this was all starting to make a horrible kind of sense.

"It's impossible," Leo gasped behind me. We made our way to the main control area and found the glass closed in.

"What is it?" Daena asked.

"It's our ship," I answered.

"But these ruins are thousands of years old," Ari pointed out.

"We were just here a few days ago," Leo stated and I could tell he was in a sort of daze like me. He went over and opened the door. Then we immediately went in. "This is what the messenger was picking up. The Oberon."

He plugged it in and we began booting up the computer. "What are you doing?" Ari questioned.

"The ship has a nuclear power source," I stated. "That's supposed to last forever." The lights and everything did boot up after a moment. Even under all the grim and dirt. We sat down as Leo got into the database. We pried the dirt off the screen.

"Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!" the Commander's face popped up. "Come in, guidance! Request instructions. We're going down!" We watched horrified as he came back on the screen after a few moments. Only this time he looked many years older. "We were searching for two lost pilots in an electromagnetic storm."

"They couldn't find us because we got pushed forward through time," Leo explained.

"We haven't had any communications since we crash-landed. This planet is uncharted and uninhabited. The apes we brought along have been very helpful. They were a lot stronger and a lot smarter than we ever imagined." More static filled the screen before another face appeared. This time it was an aged Grace. We had to play around with the filter before we could even make out what she was saying. "The apes are out of control. Two males… One named Semos and another named Orpheus, who I raised myself have taken over the group. Lea was right about him… We have weapons, but I don't know how much longer we'll last. Maybe I saw the truth when they were young but I wouldn't admit it. They were good students and-" Suddenly a scream filled the air and ape screeching took over the video.

"It was goddamn Orpheus," I whispered. I knew I had a bad feeling about him. But Semos… The Semos I knew had a hand in this as well? Good God that meant…

"They're all dead 'cause they were out looking for us. Because of me," Leo broke me out of my thoughts.

"We're alive because of you two," Ari put a hand on both our shoulders to comfort us. It didn't help much. Everyone began to walk away and we joined them as our minds raced. Oberon wouldn't be coming for us… There was no rescue. We were stuck here and had to deal with it. In fact, this entire place only existed because of us. Which also meant the Semos I knew was an ancestor of Lola, Layla, and Thade. It would explain a few things. But Orpheus. I knew I couldn't trust that bastard for a reason.

We walked outside only to be greeted with a sight. Humans, hundreds if not thousands of them, were gathering around the ruins. "Who the hell are they?" Leo asked.

"No clue," I said.

"Your stories have been spreading through the villages," Daena told us after she talked to someone. "They all want to see these two humans who defy the apes."

"This escalated quickly," I noted taking in everyone.

"Hell," Leo exclaimed. "Send them all back."

"Back where?" Daena asked. "They left their home to be with you two."

"Well, shit," I muttered looking to my brother. What the hell were we gonna do now?

Thade

We sat there for a time thinking everything over. You don't just learn what we did and expect to be alright two seconds afterwards. But eventually exhaustion took its toll and we sought refuge inside the empty husk that was once our ship. Birn decided to go off on his own to scout and see if anyone was following us. Knowing Thade… He wouldn't be far behind.

Sure enough Birn came riding back and said, "I saw them."

"How many?" Krull asked.

"As far as I could see."

"Thade has brought all his legions, which means the senate has capitulated."

"Oh crap," I exclaimed. "He's in charge now?"

"Yes."

"This isn't good."

"Daena," Leo said. "Take my sister and get your people out of here. Tell them to go to the mountains and hide while there's still a chance."

"And leave you here?" I countered. "Not happening."

"Dammit Lea would you listen to me for once?"

"No."

"They won't listen to me," Daena spoke up. As we were talking everyone gathered around and Leo hopped on a horse. "Leo!" I said and got on one of my own.

"This is a fight we can't win. I want you all to break up and scatter. I'll draw them off. I'm the one they want."

"I'm not leaving you bro." We waited and no one moved. "I don't think they're going anywhere either."

"You gotta make your people understand," Leo told Daena. "It's over. There's no help coming."

"We can't just give up," I said.

"You and your sister came," Daena stated.

"Hell if I'm gonna let it end like this," I muttered and noticed Ari off to my right.

~*~

Later.

"Going somewhere?" I asked her and Krull as they grabbed a horse and tried to sneak off.

"Lea… We were just."

"Going to see Thade?" She didn't answer. "Not alone you're not." I got on a horse of my own.

"The General will rip you in half as soon as he sees you."

"Way to stay positive Krull and keep your voice down," I said as we snuck away from everyone.

"I can talk to him Lea," Ari said and grabbed my hand. "You know it won't end will if you go."

"I know," I patted her hand back. "But this is something I have to do."

~*~

Shortly.

Easier sneaking into the enemy camp than I originally thought but they weren't looking for other apes and as long as I kept behind Krull and Ari no one seemed to notice me. We finally made our way to what looked to be Thade's tent.

"Stop!" Attar ordered. "Come closer and identify yourself." Me and Ari stayed behind Krull as we made our way over. "How dare you show your face here."

"It was not my decision," Krull responded and stepped aside. He put a reassuring hand on both me and Ari's shoulders.

"I wish to speak to Thade," Ari stated.

"Me too," I added.

Ari kept ahold of me as we were escorted into the tent by some guards. My heart felt like it was gonna beat clear out of my chest. Thade looked at us and his eyes narrowed, mainly on myself. He growled but then grunted at the guards to leave us with him. Ari never let go of me.

"Why have you two come here?" he demanded and boy did he sound pissed.

"To negotiate," Ari answered and made sure to maneuver us so she was between myself and Thade. "This doesn't have to end in bloodshed."

He snarled in reply but we stood firm. "What would you know of bloodshed?" he asked her. "Ever since you were a child you took in stray humans. Your family indulged your every

whim. Now look at you."

"You say it as if it were an insult," she stated.

"And what of you?" he took a step toward me but Ari blocked his path. "A human that came from the stars. My father told me about you before he passed."

"Wait…" I finally spoke. "Uros is dead?"

"Yes, and he said you were different from the others. That you were a friend of the apes." He looked at how Ari was guarding me. "Yet you play with them as if they were mere puppets to you."

Ari was about to say something but I patted her arm. "Ari. Can you give us a minute?"

"No Lea…"

"It'll be alright," I told her and got out of her grasp. "But what I'm about to say… It's private." Ari took a second but looked between the two of us long and hard.

"Very well. I'll be right outside." She stopped and turned back before she left. "And Thade. If you harm one hair on her head you'll have to deal with me personally." The two of them stared at one another before they both let out a growl. Ari broke it first and stepped outside the tent.

"You deceived me," he snarled. "You played me like a fool. My own sister and father knew… Yet no one bothered to fill me in. Not even you Lea."

"I…"

"Now you come to bargain yourself for the others."

"No!" I exclaimed. "I need you to listen to me. I agree that I should have told you about everything. But think back. To before Lola took me in. You hated humans. You hunted us down like we were animals." I kept eye contact with him. "But… While I was under your roof. I learned a lot of things. About your culture, this world, about your family, and even you." He scoffed at this but let me talk. "I've made friends here that I don't want to see harmed. Both human and ape. But I never intended for any of this to happen. I had no way of knowing my brother would appear. I didn't even know he was still alive."

"No, you listen to me. Why should I believe you?" he countered and took another step toward me. I held my ground. "Why should I believe anything you have to tell me? I've been kept in the dark far too long. I was right to trust my instincts. They told me something was off about you."

"But what about all the time we've spent together? Did that really mean nothing to you?" I questioned. I felt all the heat traveling to my face.

"I could ask the same thing," he replied with ice in his voice. "I should have known better than to trust a low human. I should have ended you the day you were caught."

"Oh really?" I couldn't help it as my voice cracked a bit.

~*~

Outside.

Ari shifted uncomfortably with Krull behind her and Attar standing nearby. She heard yelling coming from the tent and she prepared herself. If the yelling either stopped abruptly or Lea called out for help she'd jump to attention. She was certain Krull could handle Attar. But she plotted how she could get past the guards and into the tent if she had to.

~*~

Inside.

"Then why not end it now?" I pushed on. "It'll solve all your problems. Kill me and you won't have to worry about anything else now will you?" I hoped he would just forget about Leo.

"Do not tempt me human…" he growled and loomed over me threateningly.

"Lea," I interrupted him. "My name is Lea. You've used it before so use it now. I am a human. But I'm a lot more than that. I'm a friend, a sister, a pilot, a sentient being. Just like you. I know you see me as more than a lowly beast even if you deny it. And over the time we spent together I know you cared…"

"SILENCE!" he screeched right in my face. But he didn't hit me. "For all I know you're been playing me and my family this entire time for your own benefit. You won't fool me again. I'll go into Calima and root out every human there. Including that precious brother of yours. Then I'll make you watch as I…" He didn't get to finish that statement.

I closed the distance between us and hugged him with everything I had. Tears were in my eyes and I hated how weak sounding my voice was. "Please Thade," I used his name for the first time. "I should have told you that was wrong of me. But I never lied about anything else. I did care for you. I love you. And I know you feel something for me. Otherwise you wouldn't have done everything you did. You wouldn't have tried to make me happy and protected me like you did." My breath caught in my throat but I pushed past it. "I do care what happens to everyone out there. My friends and brother included. But I also care about you. I always did. The day I left. It felt like my heart was being torn out of my chest. But I knew if I stuck around I wouldn't be able to face you again." It was at this point I chanced looking up into his face. "Please Thade. I don't care what happens to me. But please don't make everyone else pay for my mistakes."

~*~

Thade paused when she hugged him. He took a few moments to absorb all of her words. And she's said his name. A part of him wanted to tear her apart for everything she'd done to him. How could he let a human get so close to him? But… He couldn't bring himself to do anything to harm her. Just the way she was holding onto him and she sounded on the brink of

tears. When he saw her face she was crying. His heart felt like it was breaking itself. He remembered the terror he felt when he thought she was in danger.

"You…" he finally spoke. "Love me?" She didn't seem capable of answering but nodded and hugged him again. Her face buried in his armor. He brought his hand up and remembered what his father had told him.

"But Father." Lea? How could this be?

"I asked Lea to guard us when the others come for her and this human. Her brother I'm assuming. Let them be and leave us in peace Thade."

"I cannot do that. I have to find her. Them."

"You care for her…" Thade didn't answer but Uros wasn't expecting him to. "Do not waste your life Thade. If you care for her then go after her. But I hope you understand why I did not tell you." He started shaking.

"Father…"

"Let go of your hatred Thade. It will not be easy but live a good life son…"

He patted her head. "Lea," he used her name and she looked at him. "I… Love you as well." Without thinking he bent down and kissed her. She froze for a moment before she returned it and placed her arms around his neck. He held her as tightly as he dared. Finally, they broke apart for air. "And I will never let you go again."

We Have a Chance

Leo searched around but couldn't find his sister. "Daena," he said. "Have you seen Lea?"

"No," she stated. "I haven't seen the other apes either. Except for him," she indicated Limbo.

"Oh no," he sighed and ran outside the ship.

"What's wrong?" the woman asked.

"I think my sister and the others did something very stupid," he got ready to hop on a horse.

"There they are," Brin pointed. Sure enough there was Lea, Ari, and Krull on horses.

"Who's with them?" Daena inquired.

"You've got to be kidding me," Limbo noticed the commotion. "General Thade?!"

~*~

I couldn't help but smirk at the look on everyone's faces as we rode up. Thade holding my hand. It had been surprisingly easy to sneak out of the camp with Thade's help. Attar and everyone else weren't going to be happy when they found out their General had deserted them and run off with a human. But it wasn't like he could stay and just call everything off.

From what he said Shiva and Zaius were breathing down his neck. He had to choose. And he choose me. He sure knew how to make a girl feel special.

"What the hell…" Leo said gaping at the two of us. "You've got to be kidding me Lea."

"Calm down Leo," I replied as Thade helped me off my horse. "He's on our side." As if to illustrate the point he held my hand.

"You're…" Daena started.

"Yeah," I replied. "We are." They all just stared.

"I think it's adorable," Ari said and patted my shoulder. Thade let out a low growl but didn't say anything.

"I don't even want to know," Leo sighed and looked between us. I knew he didn't care for Thade, many didn't and for good reason. "Lea, can I talk to you a second?"

"Sure." Thade stood with the others and people came to gawk at him. He kept himself in check when I gave him a warning look.

"Really?"

"Really," I said.

He sighed and didn't say anything for a long moment. "Does he make you happy?"

"Yes."

"He doesn't treat you like a pet anymore does he?"

"No Leo," I told him. In fact, Thade had been the one to take my collar off and threw it in the fire in his tent. I hadn't been able to get it off on my own.

"Alright. Never thought I'd have an ape for a brother-in-law."

"Calm down," I smiled and hugged him anyway. "We're not married yet."

"It won't be long the way he keeps looking at you."

"Uh huh," I countered. "Like how you and Ari keep looking at each other?" He ruffled my hair in reply.

~*~

It wasn't going to be easy. Even with Thade gone Attar would be the next in line to lead. But hopefully that bought us some time. And luckily Thade was a general. The humans with us didn't know much about fighting but we could give them a quick course. Not to mention he knew what to do with numbers. Krull helped out a lot with planning seeing as he had a military background.

The original attack was planned for the very next day. Thade said with him gone it probably gained us two or three at the most. In that time Krull, Thade, Leo, and I were in charge of teaching the humans how to do at least some hand-to-hand combat. What we didn't expect was to get some back up the next day.

"Virgil?" I asked seeing a very familiar orangutan come ridding up over a rock.

"Lea! Hello!" he called and I made sure everyone stood down.

"He's a friend," I said.

"And I brought company," he replied.

"Hello Lea," Zira said with Cornelius next to her. "That was quit the trip."

"Not one I hope to repeat," Galen was behind them.

"You're all here?"

"How many friends do you have?" Thade asked.

"More than I thought. What are you all doing here?"

"Your Tomo friend got in contact with all of us. He and Lola explained everything."

"I cannot believe you came from the stars," Zira hugged me. "And you didn't tell me."

"Everyone has their secrets dear," Cornelius said.

"Too true," Virgil stated. "I see you've gained more followers. That's good. Seneca should be here soon with reinforcements."

"Reinforcements?' Just why are you all here and how many are coming?"

"Is this your brother?" Zira looked at Leo.

"How come General Thade is here?" Galen inquired.

"Who are all these apes?" Daena questioned.

"Has everyone lost their minds?" Limbo spoke up.

We traded stories and they were happy to see Thade on our side. Meanwhile, we learned that Seneca was going to gather as many sympathizers as he could and meet us here. Tomo was out doing the same. Shiva was on the move and word got around scary quick about how Thade had abandoned his army for a human from the stars. Zaius was trying to use this for his own means. But thankfully Virgil stated that most of the senators weren't buying it. In fact, Virgil going to our side was a huge plus for us. At least in the political arena. When it came to actual battle we were still pretty screwed.

"Don't get me wrong," I told them after everyone had explained everything. "I appreciate the support and lord knows we need the numbers. But you do realize you could all be killed for this?"

They looked between one another. "Trust us dear," Zira took my hand. "We know what this could mean for us. But…"

"We could not abandon a friend in need," Cornelius stated.

"It is time we stood up for what we believed in," Galen smiled.

"And now's as good a time as ever," Virgil finished.

"Thanks guys," I told them. I wasn't sure if we could win the war but I had faith. We had a chance.

~*~

Later.

"So that is what happened," Thade said after I showed him the video log and explained the rest. Uros and I only knew part of the story until this place. We hardly had time to think but I knew it was important to share this with him personally.

"Yeah." I followed him into the holding area where the cages were. He stood in front of one and touched the dusty bars.

"My ancestors were here?"

"Mostly."

"And Semos himself," he turned to face me. "If he knew of you… Did you?"

"I worked with him," I said and looked at the cages. "No one else wanted to. Said he was dangerous. I only got that feeling from an orangutan named Orpheus. But I liked Semos. He was my favorite. You know it's funny," I felt him come to stand next to me. "On the day we went through the storm I promised him I'd be back. I didn't keep my promise…"

Thade put a hand on my shoulder. "You did," he reassured me. "You came back. Only this time it was to take care of his descendants." He nuzzled the side of my face and I reciprocated the gesture. "Your brother had a few words with me."

"Really?"

"Yes. He threatened to castrate me if I did not treat you like a Queen the rest of our lives."

"Leo," I sighed. I'd be having a few words of my own with him later.

"I told him he would never have to make good on that threat." He wrapped his arms around me. "I must say he is brazen. Reminds me of when I threatened Moros when he wished to prose to Lola."

"Wait…"

"Lea," he leaned back enough so he could look me in the eye. "I know this is not customary. Normally I would court you for a time before I asked your relatives for your hand. And I would offer you a gift to prove my worthiness."

"Thade," I smiled. "Nothing about this is customary. And that's perfectly fine with me. So, is this your idea of proposing?"

"I have been stubborn," he put his forehead to mine. "But I have loved you for a long time Lea. I wish to spend my entire life with you. If you will have me."

"Of course I will," I kissed him in return.

"I swear to you I will love and protect you for however long we have left. I will admit Lea it may not be long."

"We have a chance Thade. And you are giving me a gift. The greatest gift ever. You." He nuzzled me in return. For a time we just stood there letting the silence settle around us. Part of me knew this was crazy. How did we stand a chance against a trained and armed ape army? Even with the backup that might be coming. Zaius and Shiva were forces to be reckoned with. And Thade. I never would've thought this could happen. It wasn't love at first

sight and we didn't fall in love like people do in movies or romance novels. Heck, he's a sentient ape for crying out loud.

But here we were. Holding each other like we'd never let go. After all we'd been through. What were the odds we'd find each other? What were the odds things would turn out this way? And what were the odds we would win this war? I wasn't sure. Yet, somehow we'd ended up here. There was no going back or changing things. And I have to say if I had to do it all over again I would.

A Plan

The next day Seneca and his reinforcements arrived as promised. I was more than happy to see him. Though I noticed he had a new scar on his face. "Looks like you have a story to tell," I greeted him.

"Indeed. General Thade?" he noticed him on my right. "I must say this is a surprise."

"Likewise. How many are with you?" Thade asked.

"See for yourself." I was a little shocked at what I saw. Humans, apes, and monkeys were behind him. Guess he had more friends than I originally thought.

"I see you are well sister," a familiar voice said and I looked.

"Master Tomoko." I saw many others in similar garb behind him. "Boy am I glad to see you."

"We were informed of your situation," he smiled. "We came to aid your cause sister." I saw some bright robes.

"They're here too?"

"Hello young one," Nieves stated. "I knew your destiny would be fulfilled soon. I just did not know it would be within my lifetime."

Thade let out a low growl beside me and I held him back. "I thought they could help," Tomo appeared. "I am sorry if this was unwise of me Sensei," he bowed to me.

"No," I told him patting his shoulder. "Thank you for going out and telling everyone what was going on. We're gonna need as much help as we can get."

"Looks like you have many friends," we were shocked to hear that voice. "I believe we stand a good chance of winning."

"Lola!" Thade and I yelled at the same time.

"Sister, what are you doing here?" Seneca helped her down off of her horse.

"Uncle Thade!" we turned in time to see Layla run into her uncle's arms.

"Sorry," Zena approached us. "She got away from me."

"What are you three doing here?" I inquired. They were definitely safer back in the city. Away from all this.

"You should return home," Thade told her. "Take Layla and Zena and go while you still have time."

"Things are not that simple I'm afraid," Lola said and gently looked at Seneca. "Shiva and Zaius are declaring war on everyone."

I filled Leo in on the new arrivals and in turn Lola informed us of what was going on outside our basecamp. Thade leaving had horribly upset the army and for the time Attar was in charge. However, we also learned that Shiva and Zaius had teamed up to declare war on all humans. Those that hadn't escaped by now or come to join us were being rounded up and killed. We also heard that there were rumors of them doing the same to some monkeys in a few areas because they thought they were human sympathizers. Any ape caught trying to help humans or monkeys were at risk of being killed.

They were gathering up anyone and everyone they could to join the army and come to obliterate us. Things were looking bad. But we had hope. Virgil, Thade, Ari, Krull, Seneca, Lola, Nieves, and Tomoko were on our side. Rumors of how they were working with the humans were spreading as quickly as Zaius and Shiva's threats. Didn't mean things were going to be easy. Far from it. In fact, that was part of the reason for Seneca's new scar.

Shiva had learned of his betrayal. She didn't take it well and tried to kill him. Fortunately, Seneca wasn't a pushover and managed to get away. His brother Fyn wasn't as lucky. He'd been killed. Meanwhile, Lola had a run in with the vicious she-ape of her own.

She'd badmouthed Thade and said how she was going to take care of him personally. Then she'd come back and make sure Lola and the rest of the bloodline remained pure. Lola took it as a threat and she also had to lie and say she didn't know where Zena was. Even the old house wasn't safe for them anymore. So, Lola took them both and bolted out of there the first chance she got. She met up with Seneca and his growing group shortly afterwards.

Now we were a force to be reckoned with. We had numbers. Not to mention most of the apes and monkeys that had joined us knew how to fight. Heck, some of the ones Seneca found had originally been in the army under Thade. But Shiva had her own faulty religious following and Zaius knew how to rouse his own supporters.

~*~

We showed them the footage. It wasn't easy but it was the right thing to do. They deserved to know what they were fighting for exactly and how they came about. I didn't know what it would be like to learn the religion you were so used to and believed in all these years was a lie all this time. They remained quiet and surprisingly took it better than expected. "We thank you," Neives was the first to speak.

"For what?" Leo asked.

"Letting us see the truth," Seneca said. "I never did believe in the Semos thing myself."

"And it is because of you two we are even here at all," Tomoko stated. "We owe you our lives. As do all those on this world."

"Tell that to Shiva and Zaius," I said. "I don't think they'd change their minds even if they saw this."

"They are filled with a hatred for anyone in their path," Neives stated. "If not us then it would have been others."

"This war was coming long before either of you showed up," Virgil spoke up. "You just helped speed the process along."

"I must say it is long overdue," Lola put out there.

~*~

"We need a plan of attack," we sat around in the old ship planning. So far no one was entirely sure what we should do. Thade suggested we stay put and defend ourselves here on the ground we knew. We mainly agreed seeing as openly attacking the other side first wouldn't do us any good. Plus, in the public arena if we waited for them we could simply say we were defending ourselves. But we stalled on how we could stave off the initial attack.

Our numbers had increased but it wouldn't matter much if we were taken out before the battle began. Most of the humans under us had only come so far in their self-defense skills. "Wait," I thought. "Leo?"

"Yeah?"

"Does the Oberon have any juice left?"

He got what I was saying and nodded. "Only one way to find out." We went to the main console and checked the engines. There was enough power left for either one last take off, which the ship was obviously not capable of anymore, or perhaps a large burst from the outward engines.

"What does this mean?" Seneca asked as we double checked the computer systems.

"It means we may have a little surprise for the enemy," Leo said.

"What kind of surprise?" Zira inquired.

"An explosive kind," I answered. "A very big one."

"How large could it be?" Virgil asked.

"Large enough to take out an entire front line," Leo stated.

"We can rig it to respond to the messenger," I set the right commands. "All we have to do is get the enemy in the line of fire."

"Shouldn't be too hard," Leo smirked at me.

"How come I don't like how you said that?" I countered. "You're not planning on doing something stupid are you?"

"Nothing worse than going into the enemy camp on my own," he glanced at Ari and Thade.

"Oh ha ha. Very funny bro."

"I must say Lea," Lola said. "I do like your brother."

"Yeah but sometimes he can be a real idiot."

"You say that like you're so different from me," he spoke up.

"He has a point," Ari shrugged.

~*~

The next day.

"I knew he'd do something stupid," I muttered waiting for the signal. Tomo and a few other scouts had reported that the army was on the move. So we positioned everyone behind the ship and Leo and Thade went out to draw their attention. I would've gone with them but they weren't having it and I was supposed to blow the ship at they're sign. "I just didn't know Thade would go along with it."

"Males," Zira stated holding her husband's hand lovingly. Ari and I just nodded.

"This is insane," Limbo said for perhaps the fifth time in an hour.

"You're free to leave," Krull informed him.

"No one would stop you," Virgil stated.

"Yeah," he countered. "Like I wouldn't be attacked and killed the minute I get captured by them."

"It's a risk we're all willing to live with," Galen told him. It was odd that we all shared a smile at that. Our nerves were on edge. We knew we had a decent chance of not getting out of this alive. In that case we had a few of the adults, of all species, take the children and hide it out in the mountains. If things went south they were to take off.

This was it. It was our only and last stand. Us or them. I only prayed we made it out of this. If not, well I had the journal Lola had given me. I wasn't entirely sure who would find it or what they would even do with it. But they deserved to know the truth. The whole truth. Someone would learn our story. I merely hoped we would live so I could finish it.

Deus Ex Machina

"Now Lea!" Leo yelled as he and Thade rode back. I waited until they got behind the ship before I pressed the button. In return, there was a moment before the blast. I heard the screech of the ape army as they charged… Until the deafening blast happened. We all had to cover our ears as the ships engines came to life. The heat was so intense even I could feel it from where I sat. Everyone around me stayed down and we waited until the engines ran out of juice.

Then we slowly made our way around the ship and were greeted with one hell of a sight. The entire front line of apes lay there, either dead or severely wounded. Bodies thrown all over the place or charred to an absolute crisp. The stench was horrible. I felt somewhat bad. They were just solders following orders, but my guilt would have to wait as I stared across the battlefield. Attar sat up front with two familiar figures. Shiva and Zaius. Boy they got over their shock quickly. Shiva looked like she was going to rip my head off personally but Zaius was stoned face. It bothered me more than Shiva's snarling.

"ATTACK!" she yelled. Attar gave a signal and everyone charged toward us. The general and crazy priestess out front.

"Form your lines!" Thade's voice cut through. Everyone got where they were supposed to. Leo and Thade stayed on their horses along with a few others. "Lea," I looked over to where he sat.

"Yeah?"

"Stay alive," he told me. "I have no intention of living my life without you."

"Same here," I smiled at him. "You do your thing and don't die on me Thade." We shared a look and then hardened ourselves as the enemy advanced on us. I gave my friends one final look before I faced forward. I let out a breath as our sides clashed together.

I'm not going to lie. It was the ugliest thing I've ever seen. Apes, monkeys, and humans all clashed together. I nearly instantly lost track of all my friends as I had to face my own opponents. I stabbed an ape in the throat with my sword and chopped another's head off. I saw Zira knock an ape off his horse out of the corner of my eye. I also could've sworn I saw Attar and Krull snarl at each other. But I didn't exactly have time to slow down and compare notes.

Someone knocked me off my horse but the moment I landed I got back up on my feet. An ape snarled and charged me but I dodged and slashed him on my way by. If he wasn't dead he was severely wounded. I happened to see Daena and Ari to my left. They looked like they were getting along now. I didn't know how Krull was doing against Attar but the noise was nearly mind blowing. Screaming, screeching, metal on metal. If I hadn't been trained for this, maybe not with apes and monkeys but still, it would've been too much. As it was I didn't hesitate to block an attack a gorilla threw my way and stab him in the eye.

"Lea!" I turned to see Leo standing there. "Hell of a party."

"You're telling me," I replied as we both stood back to back. "You see anybody?"

"I saw Galen over there a while ago," he nodded left and we dodged an ape swinging a sword. We both stabbed him in the chest and he fell down a second later. "That Neives guy was doing alright last I saw. What about you?"

"I saw Zira, Daena, and Ari a while ago. I don't know where Krull went." We stopped and turned as an ape was thrown at us.

"Wait!" Limbo yelled. We stopped and he got up. "I didn't sign up for this!"

"Then go hide," I told him and punched an ape in the face.

"Or get out of the way," Leo added. He ran off without us needing to prompt him. "Behind you!" I warned as an ape came up behind my brother. He turned… But then an arrow stuck into the ape's chest. He fell down two feet from my brother. We looked to see the source and saw Tomoko standing there. "We are here Sensei," Tomo appeared and threw an ape that tried to attack me.

"Thanks," I told him and kicked another ape away from myself. "But if you can go and help the others."

"Yes, Sensei," he replied and I saw him disappear back into the fighting. Tomoko didn't run off as fast but the apes that approached him were soon down for the count or nursing broken bones.

Honestly, I couldn't tell who was winning. Dead apes, monkeys, and humans started piling up on the ground. Blood was everywhere and I wondered how much longer this was going to go on. Then I saw her… Shiva. She was off her horse by now but charging through everyone like she was insane. I couldn't tell what she was yelling but I guessed it was "Traitors!" and "You'll all die!"

Then she stopped and I turned to see what she was staring at. Thade. She made a charge right for him. I gripped my sword tighter. "No you don't!" I think Leo called out to me but I didn't hear much as I ran toward her. Blood pumped through my veins and I could only hear my heartbeat.

"Heretic!" she called as she raised her sword. Before she could go at Thade I kicked her.

"Back off bitch!" I snarled at her.

"Lea?"

"Nice to see you too Thade," I told him as we kept fighting.

"You gave up everything for this human!" Shiva was back on her feet. "How could you stoop so low? You might as well be bedding a cow!"

"Cow?" I repeated. "That's harsh."

"You will not speak of her!" Thade charged her. "You forget while you've been preaching I've been in combat."

"Go Thade," I smirked as he forced her to back up.

"You have not won yet human," I heard behind me. I turned just in time to nearly get my head cut off. Instead a cut formed above my eye.

"Zaius," I saw who it was. "I thought you were too good to get your hands dirty."

"If only I had talked Thade into handing you over to me," he told me keeping a straight face. "This would never have happened." I blocked a few of his attempts but one cut my arm. I ignored it and held my ground. "You and your kin should never have come."

"If we hadn't you wouldn't even be here," I told him and got one shot in on him. His arm dripped down blood. For a Senator he sure knew how to fight.

"If it were up to you we'd still be slaves." That got me. How did he? "Oh yes girl I know. Semos wasn't the only ancestor to pass down advice to his descendants. My forefather told me this might occur. To watch for it. Mainly a human with two different colored eyes."

"Let me guess… Orpheus was your ancestor." He just narrowed his eyes at me. "I should've known. You know the both of you were the only apes who ever gave me the creeps. I knew something was wrong with him. Just like you."

"You have no right to speak of him human!" that got a rise out of him. I saw Thade and Shiva now actually beating each other out of the corner of my eye. "You cannot win this. I'm stronger, faster, smarter, better than you will ever be!" He managed to knock the sword out of my hands. Then he punched me in the face. Ow. I was lucky it didn't break some of my teeth. But it did make me stagger.

"You talk too much," he turned and Leo hit him with a rock to the face. "You alright sis?"

"Look out!" I warned but it was too late. Zaius grabbed Leo by the arm and jerked him around. It was a wonder it didn't break it.

"You were lucky once," he told us. "But I will finish what my ancestor could not." He grabbed Leo by the throat. I was about to step in when I heard a noise. It was loud… Everyone literally stopped what they were doing. We all looked up to see a light in the sky.

"You've got to be kidding me," I recognized that noise. Leo did too as he managed to get out of Zaius' grasp as he stood there surprised. The old ape looked like he was gonna have a heart attack. A familiar pod came into view. "I don't believe it," I muttered as the pod made a perfect landing. Right in the middle of the battlefield. Everyone, ape, human, and monkey alike stood back and watched. Dust was kicked up everywhere. The pod's window slid back and the chair came forward a bit. The pilot of the ship sat there in his suit. Then he reached up and pulled back his visor to reveal an ape face.

"Pericles!" I cheered.

Never Be the Same

"Semos," nearly all the ape army gasped as they stood down. More like knelt but still. Only those with us, Shiva, and Zaius didn't bow.

"I don't believe it," Leo looked to me. We slowly made our way through everyone to the pod. Pericles smiled at us and gave us a thumbs up.

We returned it as we got him out of there. No one interfered. "Hi buddy," I told him taking off his helmet.

"Pericles," Leo added. "That was a better landing than us."

"Come on," I helped him down as Leo grabbed his emergency bag. I knew there was another gun in there.

"Okay," he said as Pericles took both our hands. "Let's go explain evolution to the monkeys."

"And apes," I added. Everyone cleared a path for us. We stopped a moment and I saw most of our group nearby. Thade included. Leo started rummaging through the bag when we heard a screech. "Liars!" we were both then knocked over as Shiva barreled into us. "Deceivers!" Pericles took off toward the ship out of fear. "That is not Semos!"

I'll admit things got hectic after that. Thade and Ari appeared to come out of nowhere and tackled Shiva and Zaius as they started to beat on us. "Fight!" Zaius ordered. Some of the ape soldiers did begin fighting with our allies again. While others stood around looking confused as hell.

Leo and I managed to get free from the melee. "Go!" Thade said throwing Shiva aside. "We have this." We made a quick nod and took off in the direction of where Pericles had run back into the ship. Too bad we had our backs turned. We didn't see Attar come barreling into Thade and Zaius knocked Ari out of his way.

~*~

We ran into the ship and got about ten feet before we were jumped. As a result we went tumbling through the dust into the bowel of the ship. We managed to grab onto a piece before we completely fell into the ancient debris. Shiva and Zaius sneered down at us. "I'll enjoy this," Shiva smirked before we were roughly kicked. We knocked into each other as we landed in the sand.

We didn't have time to recover as they were on us once again. I felt Shiva beating me and heard Zaius doing the same to Leo. No matter how civilized they acted these apes resorted to their violent instincts in a battle. But then an unexpected thing happened. There was awful screeching as Pericles jumped on Zaius. The older ape attempted to get our buddy off of him and yelled at Shiva for assistance. It gave me and Leo enough time to crawl out of their reach and get to the bag.

"PERICLES!" I yelled seeing Shiva knock the chimp into a wall. Pericles slid down it and rolled into the sand. Leo managed to grab the gun as the two pissed off apes jumped around the walls headed right for us. Leo fired a few times and managed to clip Shiva in the shoulder but it was hard trying to hit them when they were jumping around.

They landed right in front of us. Shiva seemed stunned for the moment but Zaius smacked Leo and grabbed and literally threw me. I heard Leo let out a groan of pain and I felt like the wind had been knocked out of me. We glanced to each other and then frantically looked to where the gun had flew. It was in the control room. We looked at the distance between it and us. Then at them.

Both apes seemed to know what we were going for. Zaius knocked Leo back down to the ground and Shiva leapt over to grab the weapon. Zaius soon joined her as he inspected the piece for himself. But she kept ahold of it. They sniffed it and she turned it around in her hand.

I grunted in pain as I stood up and helped Leo get back to his feet. We looked at each other and I happened to glance over at the identification piece on the wall. We held up our hands and I slowly inched toward it. Just in time for us to see everyone come up behind us, Attar included. It was also the moment Shiva figured out how to handle the gun.

"You humans and your weapons," Zaius preached like he'd won. "No one will know of them once you're gone."

"Done in by your own toys," Shiva cackled. "Aw Thade. Good I wanted you to see this. I was planning on gutting this human in front of you but I think this will do." Thade let out a growl but I motioned for him to stay back. He reluctantly did so.

I put my hand on the door lock. It closed right as she fired. The fire ricocheted in the tiny room and I saw Zaius fall down. He clutched his stomach and I saw blood start to come out of where he'd been hit. Shiva momentarily panicked. "Serves you right," I bluntly told her. She looked and sneered back at me before she aimed again.

"Shiva…" Zaius gasped from where he laid. "Don't." She didn't listen and attempted to get me. When that failed she came up and started banging on the glass.

"Don't just stand there!" she looked right at Attar. "They'll turn us all into slaves! Kill them!"

"Listen," Leo started. "This is where you're from. We brought you here."

"It's the truth old friend," Thade came up beside me.

"We used to live together," I said. "But Orpheus, his ancestor," I indicated Zaius. "He tricked Semos and killed everybody."

"Lies!" Shiva screamed through the glass. "Help me! You're a devoted follow of Semos as well! Do not renounce your faith."

"Things are not what we thought," Thade told him and put a hand on his shoulder. "These humans showed me the truth. I then made my choice," he walked over and put his arm on my shoulder. "Now it is your turn."

Attar seemed to contemplate a second. Before he looked at the glass and sneered at the two apes inside. "Everything I have believed in is a lie. You and Zaius have betrayed us. I won't help you anymore." With that he backed away from the glass. Shiva looked like she wanted to rip his eyes out.

"They will… Enslave us all," Zaius gasped out. "You must know that."

"That is where you're wrong," Vrigil came forward. "We can live in peace. It was apes like you who kept us in the dark."

"Humans… My ancestor should have killed… You all," he looked over to me and Leo when he said that. Thade growled at him and held me closer. I saw Ari step up next to Leo.

Before anyone could say anything else Shiva lost her shit. She looked at everyone and began firing the weapon as if she could get us. Zaius didn't say anything as sparks flew around him and we could hear the noise of things being destroyed. At one point Shiva made noises as she climbed up the glass and attempted everything she could to get out. She banged on it but kept firing. At one point it got so bad smoke clouded the entire glass so we couldn't see inside. Eventually the sparks flew out and the noise stopped. When it did we saw Zaius lying where he'd fallen. His eyes were open and looked clouded over and he didn't move. Shiva came into view as well. She was on the floor leaning against the chair. Blood poured out of her, mainly a hole in the top of her head. The gun still in her hand.

~*~

We left them there as me and Leo ran to go find Pericles. We found him in his old cage and gently picked him up. "You ok buddy?" I asked as he hugged us.

"You okay?" Leo asked. "You came home."

"Good boy," I told him. "It's safe."

"You can come out now," Leo finished.

"What?" Limbo asked appearing from one of the cages. "It's over? I was getting ready to make my move."

~*~

We went outside and broke up the fighting. I was thankful to see our friends had survived, except for poor Krull. Both sides gathered up the bodies and put them in graves. "We will leave the graves unmarked," Attar told us. "No one who comes here will be able to tell apes from humans or monkeys. They all will be mourned together, as it should be from now on."

"Limbo!" I called seeing him messing with the pod. "Get out of there."

"I'm not doing anything," he replied.

"Pericles, this is Thade," I introduced the two. "Thade, Pericles. An old friend of mine." Thade leaned in and the two chimps sniffed one another. Then Pericles smiled at him and gave him a thumbs up. "I think he likes you," I stated. Pericles then pointed. "What? You wanna go with Leo for a bit?" He nodded. "Ok then." I handed him off to my brother.

"Lea," Leo said after a moment. "I'll be right back." I noticed Ari.

"Take all the time you need player," I smirked at him.

"Shut up." I happened to see him hand Pericles off to Ari. Then we both looked as the pod started beeping. We ran over to it. "It's found the coordinates of the storm that brought us here," he said.

"Ok," I said.

"You know," Ari came up to us after Pericles climbed onto Lola. "It would mean a great deal to everyone… If you both would stay. It would mean a great deal to me."

"We have to leave now."

"What?" I asked.

"It's our ticket home Lea," Leo said.

"Leo," I sighed. "We have no way of knowing if the storm would spit us out where or when we wanted to go. If we even came out at all!"

"We have to take the chance," he started.

"No we don't," I countered. "Look around," I indicated to everyone. "This could be our home. We came here for a reason Leo and…" I took a step back. "I'm sorry but this is the one time I won't follow you."

"Lea…"

"Please stay," Zira started as she and the others came over. Thade hugged me to him like he'd never let me go. I held onto his arms.

"Things are going to be very different now," Virgil stated. "Changes are in order."

"You could be a part of that," Galen offered.

"Help us," Cornelius offered.

"We'd miss you too much if you left," Lola stated.

"She's right," Seneca stood next to her. I saw a look cross between them and I wondered if something was going on there.

"But…" I could see my brother's determination failing.

"We could have a family here," I spoke up. "If you go back up there Leo… Who knows what could happen to you. And… I lost you once. I'd rather not loss you again. Stay."

"I'd rather…" Ari started looking at my brother. "That you not be reduced to a mere story or fairytale. You could stay here. With us. With me." Leo seemed to think a moment. He looked around at all of us and I could see the wheels turning in his head. I gave him a smile and nodded.

He let out a long sigh. "Alright," he said. "But there's something I've been meaning to do." Then just like that he leaned over and kissed Ari. Everyone froze but I let out a small chuckle.

"My brother the player."

"You're one to talk," Leo said and went to turn off the pod. No sense wasting its energy when we didn't need. I broke free of Thade's grasp as I went to check the ship as well.

"Oh," Limbo said holding a bag.

"Keep it," I stated.

"You know," he said and patted my brother on the shoulder. "I'd like to thank you two for opening my eyes to a brave new world of trade with the humans." I saw Leo look over at Daena.

"She'll be fine," I told him as I watched Galen come over to sit by her. She seemed a bit put off but tolerated him. It was a start. "Besides," I looked over his shoulder. "We've got someone waiting for us."

"Yeah," Leo gave Ari the same look I gave Thade.

"Alright kids," I heard Limbo say behind us. "Who wants to buy some aspirin?" Children came up to him and laughed.

"Brave new world indeed." I looked around and saw Zira and Cornelius talking with some other humans. Tomo and the others were helping any of the wounded and Neives was conversing with some old woman about something. Galen sat and was talking with Daena, or at her in any case. Seneca and Lola conversed as Layla ran around and played with some human kids. I also saw Virgil and Zena stood off to the side, holding hands.

I smirked at seeing Leo acting embarrassed as he took Ari's hand and they started walking off. "So," I walked up to Thade. "We did it."

"Yes," he smirked at me and scouted over so I could sit next to him on the rock. He put an arm around my shoulder and we rested against each other. "We did."

"What do you think will happen now?" I asked.

"I am not sure. But I know this," he tilted my chin up so I'd look at him. "Things will never be the same."

I smiled at him in return. "You're right about that."

Epilogue: The Future

A hundred years later.

"Star!" a voice rang out. The young girl looked over from where she'd been staring at the pod in its protective case. "There you are," a young male chimp came over to her. "You're still staring at this old thing?"

"It's not that old," she told him. "Can you believe it came from the same place Senator Lea and Leo did?"

"Yeah," he looked at it before glancing back at her. "You wanna come over to my house after school?"

"Taru," she sighed. "Our ancestor's entire history changed over the course of a year and you don't even seem to care."

"I do care."

"Uh huh," she countered. "Could you imagine it? It musta been weird back before they came. You know if they hadn't shown up we probably wouldn't be friends."

"No," he said balancing on the bench she sat on. "Course we'd be friends." She gave him a look. "So, you comin' over or not?"

"Yeah," she said. "I just gotta tell my mom first. What you wanna play later?"

"How about your favorite?" he grinned at her.

"Really?" she smiled back.

"Course," he lightly shoved her shoulder.

"Kay," she shoved him back. "But I get to be Senator Lea."

"Only if I get to be General Thade."

"There you two are," there teacher, an older female lemur came up to them. "You know you're not supposed to stray from the others."

"Sorry teacher," they both said.

She smiled. "It's alright at least you stayed with each other. Now come along. We'll be leaving the museum soon."

"Coming," Taru said jumping off the bench.

"Just a sec," Star stated getting down. She grabbed her bag but took a second more to stare at the pod.

"Come on, Star," Taru grabbed her hand.

"Hey Taru?" she asked as they walked past statues of famous leaders. They saw the rest of their school group with their teacher up ahead.

"Yeah?" he stopped to look back at her.

"You think I could be great like them one day?"

"You will," he replied without thinking. They started walking. "Think I will?" he asked after a moment.

"No duh," she smiled at him as they walked beside each other.

"Star?"

"Yeah?"

"How about we be great together?" He glanced over to her.

"I'd like that," she replied.

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